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The Deepest South: A Comparative Analysis of issues of exile in the work of selected women writers from South Africa and the American south.

by

Jacqueline Susan Meisel, M.A.

March 2013

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Lancaster University

Jacqueline Susan Meisel

The Deepest South: A Comparative Analysis of issues of exile in the work of selected women writers from South Africa and the American south.

Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which exile, both actual and metaphorical, informs the work of four pathbreaking female writers from South Africa and the American south: Carson McCullers, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb and Dorothy Allison. In this study, exilic consciousness is closely linked to postcolonial, nomadic feminisms which can best be understood as liminal, as fundamentally ‘out of place’. The border-crossings involved here are not only geographical, they also signify a change in critical consciousness, as the foundational texts of this thesis—Rosi Braidotti’s *Nomadic Feminism* and Francoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih’s *Minor Transnationalism*—indicate. By exploring writers who problematise the categories of race, gender, sexuality and class I demonstrate how these writers offer new ways of reading the postcolonial condition as nomadic, and I examine the shared processes that nations and individuals undergo as they experience political and personal liberation struggles.

My thesis is divided into four main parts. The opening section offers both an introduction to, and rationale for, the study, providing historical and sociocultural contextualization linking South Africa and the American south; it goes on to establish my choices of Carson McCullers and Dorothy Allison as the southern US writers in this study and Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb as the South Africans. In opening chapter I interrogate self-representation and variations in autobiography by the four writers. Chapter 2 has as its focus body and exilic consciousness in selected work by all four writers. My final chapter examines identity formation as situated subjectivity

in the work of Allison and Wicomb who are foregrounded here. I contend that transnationalism need not be seen as inevitably homogenising; rather, I show that minority individuals and groups can establish agency through transversal, lateral networks.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

I offer my deepest gratitude and love to my husband, Alex, for supporting me in every way through the long and challenging journey that is the PhD. For five years he has listened to me talk through shifting theoretical perspectives as I attempted to understand them myself, read bits of my thesis even though he said it was like doing tough Sudoku with words, and best of all, he cooked fabulous meals for our family so that I could sit at my desk and keep pressing on the way that transnational nomadic feminists must.

I would like to give my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Lucy Collins, who has provided encouragement and constructive criticism steadfastly through my PhD process. She has challenged my ideas in order to bring out the best in me. Despite the great distance between Dublin and Los Angeles, it has felt as if she is never too far away to help me to refine a conference paper proposal or chat about postcolonial feminism on the facebook page she set up for the two of us so that I wouldn't feel too isolated as an international student working alone.

To my writing groups, I thank you for reading drafts and offering suggestions. I appreciate having been made an honorary member of Lezerati even though I don't technically fit the criteria. Your useful feedback helped me 'kick it into gear for the last lap'! Thank you to Nicole and Linda for our monthly PhD lunch meetings. We are living proof of the efficacy of transversal, nomadic networks of support.

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Introduction and Rationale: Framing Feminist Nomads—Cape Town to the Carolinas

My thesis looks closely at the ways in which exile, both physical and metaphorical, informs the work of four female writers from South Africa and the American south. By physical exile I mean uprooting oneself and moving one's dwelling place; it is the actual displacement or deterritorialization of the material body usually as a result of geopolitical circumstances. Metaphorical exile refers to psychic and affective transitions from one state of mind to another; this is the nomadism of critical consciousness. My work makes a vital new contribution to the study of postcolonial writing by women, offering a feminist nomadic approach to the analysis of writing that has grown out of the different liberation struggles-- both political and personal--of Carson McCullers, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb and Dorothy Allison. By foregrounding the notion of exile and by engaging in comparative analysis of their work, I will be adding a new dimension to how future scholars think about these authors.

This introduction provides the historical and sociocultural background to show literary convergences as well as dissonances between South Africa and the American south. I make the case for viewing this literature through a feminist transnational lens, arguing in particular that there are shared processes that nations (following Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities¹) and individuals undergo. In terms of their perceived identities, both nations and people have a complicated idea of themselves as material bodies as well as, to varying degrees, a sense of their own cultural, discursive construction. The greatest influence on this understanding has to

¹ Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, introduces the idea that a nation or group as a socially constructed community imagined by people who perceive themselves to be part of that group or community of interest.

do with language, with the narratives we are told or that we tell ourselves to explain who we think we are.

The Writers

By disturbing ideas of place-centred identities, I show that postcolonial and transnational feminisms can best be understood as liminal, in fact as fundamentally ‘out of place’. The sense of being in place or out of place is at the heart of the exilic consciousness² that may inspire a nomadic journey. The issue of exile and its connection to questions of identity, or conversely questions about identity precipitating a nomadic kind of exile, highlights the many different thresholds or liminalities engendered by such an interrogation. Adrienne Rich’s notion of the ‘politics of location’ comes to mind in that it has to do first with the body, the material, and then with cartographic location as well as the place or location of one’s current thinking. Both can and will change and both are mediated by the identifications and subjectivity that pertain at that time and place.

An adaptation of the nomadism described by Rosi Braidotti in *Nomadic Subjects* is the main lens through which I view the fiction in this study. Braidotti writes that ‘nomadism is a theoretical option and an existential condition’ (2011: 22). I mention Braidotti in passing here, but will go into far greater depth about the path I take to nomadism and transnational feminism in the upcoming section: ‘Framing a Theoretical Approach’.

I choose key writers whose work and writing lives show liminal subjectivities in action. Carson McCullers (1917-1967; U.S. south) and Bessie Head (1937-1986; South Africa) lived, wrote and died during the twentieth century, and represent an

² Huma Ibrahim coins the term ‘exilic consciousness’ in her 1996 monograph *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile*.

earlier generation of women writers than the next two, who are still working at this time. Zoë Wicomb (b. 1948; South Africa) and Dorothy Allison (b. 1949; U.S. south) are currently writing and teaching. By exploring writers who problematise the categories of race, gender, sexuality and class I demonstrate how they offer new ways of reading the feminist exilic condition. In addition to an examination of shifting place, the focus on generational span is significant in tracing the engagement with feminism from the ‘first generation’ writer of this grouping, McCullers, to Head as the next writer, chronologically speaking. I use McCullers and Head as a sort of baseline against which to indicate changes that occurred in feminist and postcolonial theory by the time Wicomb and Allison were writing and publishing. As will be seen, my bias or emphasis will be more on the close reading of work by Wicomb and Allison who are the focus of the final chapter because they are still working. In all cases, however, it is crucial to look at the historical moment at which the nation is engaged in nation-building and the writer is engaged in writing. Narrative is crucial to both processes.

South Africans, Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb, spurred on in their decisions to leave the country of their birth by the harshness of the apartheid regime (1948-1994), emigrated to Botswana and Scotland respectively. Both Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb were classified ‘coloured’ or mixed race under South Africa’s rigid system of racial categorization and segregation. As such, they were denied the right to vote and deprived of the political and material freedoms and opportunities that would accrue to citizenship in a true democracy, which South Africa was not. In this sense, they are similar to one another by being exilic in their otherness if we take the Foucauldian view of the received, problematic western notion of the white, heterosexual male as the norm. Thus, from my perspective, Head and Wicomb would have been exilic even if they had physically remained in their places of origin.

The writers in this work from the American south have their exilic similarities, too. Carson McCullers grew up in Columbus, Georgia, and set much of her fiction in the Deep South. She lived in New York for a time and travelled abroad, but more than exchanging one place on the map for another, McCullers' exile was her own sense of otherness which came, in part, from struggling with chronic illness throughout her life. Emphasis on the body is key in both racial hybridity (Head and Wicomb classified as coloured) and abnormal health conditions (McCullers' childhood rheumatic fever and later her series of strokes and alcoholism³).

Dorothy Allison's exilic consciousness arose, to an extent, from growing up in an abjectly poor, violent home in which she was sexually abused by her stepfather. She did not actually leave the United States, but did move thousands of miles from her birthplace, South Carolina, in the conservative south east, traversing many state borders, across the continent to liberal northern California. Both Carson McCullers and Dorothy Allison are white and queer.⁴

All four writers reveal in their work the inner alienation or exile of not belonging. They are deemed other by normative forces. Sense of place is crucial to the writer who has had to leave home or who is not at home in her own skin in the original home. Consciousness of displacement emerges in the details of setting and language, so I will examine the various narrative strategies and styles that these writers choose, their use of literary form and the ways in which they are innovative. The exploration of generational differences, of McCullers and Head representing the old guard and Allison and Wicomb the new, led to interesting discoveries about the

³ References to McCullers's health issues are from that portion of the introduction to *The Mortgaged Heart* (2005) written by her sister, the editor, Margarita G. Smith.

⁴ McCullers was bisexual and Allison is a lesbian. I use the inclusive term 'queer' because of its sociopolitical connotations. While acknowledging controversy around this word, I consciously choose to use it in my work to refer to those who reject traditional gender identities and can be seen as transgressing the heteronormative rules for sex and gender.

writing lives of women from the 1940s to the present. McCullers and Head grew up under systems of legally codified racism and rigidly sexist mores, while Allison and Wicomb have seen in their lifetimes the transition (in law if not everywhere in practice) away from racism and sexism.

Fluctuating Identities, Multiple Figurations

This comparative analysis is informed by the recognition of a tension between traditional lifestyles and modernity as a result of colonisation in Africa especially, and the southern United States. Modernity becomes postmodernity as imposed universally by the west in its imperialistic project of globalization. My specific interest here is in transnational feminism, with its origins in postcolonialism, as an approach to literary theory. I seek to interrogate the fluctuating identity of the marginalised female fictional character in relation to a multi-dimensional consciousness of power in the society in which she finds herself. Society is constituted by any combination of the individual in the family, community, nation or the wider world. The character will sometimes understand herself and the other characters in terms of the human relationship to production, labour, property, and the way these are affected or conditioned by gender, race and circumstances. She may be hyperaware of being *in* or *an* exile, psychically or physically displaced, liminal, and, in some cases, very conscious of the power relations at work causing this state.⁵ In the case of characters who are naive, themselves unaware of evolving self-identity in relation to the body

⁵ This form of consciousness has been theorized by proponents of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology. The theory privileges the unique perspective achievable by a marginalised individual who is simultaneously aware of the dynamic between the vertical, central operations of those who dominate positions of power and of those, like herself, who occupy a space that is lateral or on the fringes. A far more nuanced discussion than I can offer here can be found in Sandra Harding's chapter "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is Strong Objectivity?" from Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (eds.) *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

and the body politic, the reader becomes aware of the discursivity of identity as well as the importance of the historical moment, as if on her behalf.

Postcolonialism

The postcoloniality of the South African situation is clear. The Cape, at the bottom tip of South Africa, was first colonised by the Dutch in 1652 and was later annexed by Great Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The country's indigenous inhabitants, the Khoisan, as well as Bantu groups⁶ migrating south into the area were violently subjugated by European Christian explorers and empire builders who trekked north into the interior. More land was appropriated for the Crown and South Africa remained part of the Commonwealth until 1961. An overlapping kind of colonialism emerged when in 1948, the National Party won the election on the platform of apartheid or racial segregation, providing separate and unequal opportunities under the guise of maintaining ethnic purity. Under apartheid law, people were classified and segregated according to race: Whites, Asians, Coloureds, Blacks.⁷ After some political manipulation Cape coloureds were removed from the voters' roll so that for the remainder of the apartheid regime only whites could vote. While South Africa was still a member of the Commonwealth until 1961 and most of the white, English-speaking population maintained cultural allegiance to Britain (even though most had never actually been there), the incoming whites-only government in

⁶ When European sailors and settlers first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, southern Africa had been inhabited for thousands of years by hunter-gatherers called the San. Approximately 2000 years ago, sheep, goat, and cattle herders related to the San moved into the area; these herders were the Khoi, the ancestors of the Griqua people to whom Zoë Wicomb traces her origins. Around 300 A.D. the San and the Khoi encountered people who moved down from central Africa. These people, who spoke the languages called Bantu, were the ancestors of today's black South Africans. (Drobia Meisel 1997: 14) The word 'Bantu' refers to both the languages and the people.

⁷ Nigel Worden provides a useful chronology of events in his 2012 historiography *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy*.

1948 comprised mostly Afrikaans-speaking descendants of Dutch and German settlers and French Huguenots.⁸ This constituted a kind of postcolonial overlap.

Less obviously postcolonial is the American south assessed as a 'national, postcolonial, and imperial' project relentlessly in search of itself (O'Brien 2004: 2). I acknowledge that the first nations or Native Americans were the first to be colonised by invaders and settlers, but it is beyond the scope of this work to examine that particular colonisation and its consequences in detail. The north east of what is today the United States of America was colonised initially by the Dutch; New York was first New Amsterdam. Later, the coloniser was Britain. In the south, particularly Louisiana, there remain to this day French, Spanish and African influences that add layers of complexity to the legacy of southern colonialism. Of course any analysis of racial and gender issues must look back at the history of the region. The South of the twentieth century is, in part, the result of the kidnapping and hazardous transportation of Africans across the Atlantic to the slave markets of the southern United States. One of the causes of the Civil War was the South's desire to maintain slavery for its economic benefits to whites and the North's fight for emancipation. On defeat by the North, the southern Confederate states were colonised by the northern Union. Some southerners to this day refer to the Civil War as the War of Northern Aggression, thus its aftermath will have been perceived as colonisation.⁹ After the end of the Civil War

⁸ Clearly this is a very brief overview of an extremely complex political and historical period. I have used Worden's book cited above and Robert Ross's *A Concise History of South Africa* (2008) as my main references.

⁹ This perspective is evident in the Charge to the Sons of Confederate Veterans given by Lt. General Stephen Dill Lee, CSA, Commander General of the United Confederate Veterans 1906 and still emphasized today on an 'educational' website that refers to the Civil War as the War of Northern Aggression as well as the War for Southern Independence : "To you, Sons of Confederate Veterans, we submit the vindication of the Cause for which we fought; to your strength will be given the defense of the Confederate soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, the emulation of his virtues, the perpetuation of those principles he loved and which made him glorious and which you also cherish. Remember it is your duty to see that the true history of the South is presented to future generations". Sons of Confederate Veterans Homepage[online].[cited 25 April 2012] Available from:

in 1865, when the North took over the devastated southern states, all the inhabitants, white southerners and emancipated black slaves, were faced with a new set of rules superimposed over the old. Reconstruction and the era of racist Jim Crow laws¹⁰ represented a different nuance to what was really a variation on the same old colonial social injustice. The real difference was that human beings could no longer legally be bought and sold. Gradual decolonisation and fledgling democracy in practice only began in earnest during and after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Against this background, the twentieth century south can be thought of as postcolonial.¹¹

As far away from each other as they appear to be on a globe, South Africa and parts of the American south have some similar strands woven into their different histories. I caution against attempting direct comparisons between the South African anti-apartheid liberation struggle and the U.S. Civil Rights movement since they are clearly not the same. There are, however, enough similarities in issues of power and social justice in both places to make this exploration of their postcolonial legacies a generative project. Discussion of the writing of these four women from both places yields rich material with interesting overlapping concerns as well as marked differences and distinctions.¹²

<http://www.scv674.org/SH-Introduction.htm> My evaluation of this material is that it is reconstructionist propaganda rather than scholarly work.

¹⁰ These were laws and ordinances passed between 1877 and 1965 legalizing racial segregation. Leslie Tischauser's *Jim Crow Laws* (2012) provides a history of racial segregation from the end of the Civil War until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

¹¹ This very brief overview of an extremely complex period is necessitated by limits of time and space. I have used William C. Davis's *Look Away! A History of the Confederate States of America* (2003) as my main reference.

Generations Past and Present

To situate the writers I have selected chronologically, Carson McCullers was born in Georgia in 1917 and was twenty-two when her novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* was published (Houghton Mifflin, 1940) to critical acclaim at the time, much of which emphasized her youth perhaps more than her talent (Clark & Friedman, 1996). In the almost thirty years between publication of McCullers's first novel and that of Head in 1969, the publishing world changed significantly for women. Although three decades separated these writers' first novels, conditions surrounding writing and publication were so challenging for black women in southern Africa, that the progress one might expect after thirty years in the status of women's writing never transpired due to the racism, sexism and economic difficulties facing those writers. In this sense, McCullers and Head were more like contemporaries than writers separated by a generation. During the first three quarters of the twentieth century, while more women than ever were being published, important editorial decisions were made mostly by white men in London and/or New York.¹³

While the road to publication may not have been easy, it speaks to the quality of their work and to their persistence that the four writers have multiple publications, are still in print and that their books are often required reading for university students. South African Bessie Head, was born in 1937 and her novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* was first published by Simon & Schuster in New York and two months later by Gollancz in London in 1969 (Eilersen 1995:111). Head died in Botswana in 1986, five years before apartheid officially ended and eight years before democracy was

¹² Anthony Marx interrogates similarities between the South African and North American colonial legacies in *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (1998).

¹³ Jason Epstein's book *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present and Future* (2002) chronicles his experiences as the founder of Anchor Books, working in publishing for five decades in New York

established in South Africa in 1994. Zoë Wicomb, also South African, was born in 1948 and published her first book, a collection of linked short stories, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, in 1987. The book was originally published in London and New York by Virago Press and Random House respectively, and in South Africa for the first time in 2008 by Umuzi. Wicomb lives in Scotland and has recently retired from lecturing at the University of Strathclyde. It is noteworthy that the South Africans were first published overseas rather than at home. Wicomb's contemporary, Dorothy Allison, was born in 1949. Allison's book of poetry, *The Women Who Hate Me*, was published by Long Haul Press in 1983. Her short story collection, *Trash*, was published by Firebrand Books in 1988 and her best-selling novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, was published by Dutton in 1992. Allison is often invited to be a visiting faculty member at prestigious universities in the United States and is a favourite keynote speaker at literature and writing conferences. As of this writing, both of the latter two women are still working.

Liminal subjectivities

Certainly the four writers have different personal and political perspectives and different purposes or agendas. Yet analysis of their novels and stories yields a common theme, which is the perception of identity and identitarian politics in the context of destabilising global events and the advent of the postmodern turn. In the face of shifting material realities including two devastating world wars in the twentieth century and a dawning sense of the provisional nature of knowledge, the writers' literary production reveals a preoccupation with questions of identity formation. If liminality connotes the border or threshold, then it is in their various

spanning a time when the white, male editor was the norm and very few women or Jews, certainly no blacks, were admitted into the exclusive editorial enclave of the major publishing houses.

liminal subjectivities that these writers can be linked. For each writer, her liminality is borne of a mixture of sociocultural factors and personal marginality. The space and place she occupies is a factor in moulding her identity which is not fixed or unified. As mentioned, both South Africa and the American south exhibited, to varying extents, a postcolonial sensibility in terms of proscriptions based on gender, race and class. In respect to gender and sexuality, this includes African and Eurocentric traditions of heterosexual normativity and its concomitant homophobia, important in the analysis of all the writing, but more obviously so in the case of Carson McCullers's and Dorothy Allison's work. Gender roles rather than queer sexuality are emphasised in most work by Head and Wicomb (although Head's madness¹⁴ does manifest in parts of *A Question of Power* where she writes in detail and disapprovingly about 'deviant' sexuality). In 2009, Wicomb published a short story, 'In Search of Tommie', about a gay South African man living with AIDS. As coloured women, Head and Wicomb can be seen as doubly subjugated due to the patriarchal nature of both African culture and the white supremacist apartheid regime. Adding economic disadvantage to the mix further complicates their racial and gendered subjugation; Bessie Head was poor for all of her life and Zoë Wicomb grew up in a working class home. As for the white southerners, McCullers was raised in a working class home while Allison was abjectly poor as a child.

The intersectionality of this study complicates the analysis of the writers so that they are not separable into what may at first glance appear to be two clear categories: biracial South Africans as one pair and queer, white Americans from the south as the other. Numerous permutations are possible in pairing the writers for comparison or contrast, or for singling one out for closer scrutiny. Head and

¹⁴ While living in Serowe, Botswana, in 1969 Head experienced intensifying insomnia-fuelled paranoia that culminated in a complete nervous breakdown for which she was temporarily hospitalized (Sample,

McCullers, the earlier writers, can be linked through their struggles with illness and alcoholism. Wicomb and Allison, on the other hand, traverse personal, generic and geographic borders in the context of the evolving global ethical considerations relevant to twenty first century writers who also teach. All four women grew up in the context of stringently imposed Eurocentric patriarchal cultures spread across borders as part of global transnationalism. Original ethos is crucial for each writer; while a regime might change or a person may emigrate, normative foundations endure, whether one absorbs them or resists them. Rosi Braidotti explains that '[w]riting is not only a process of constant translation but also of successive adaptations to different cultural realities' (1994: 16). Each one of these four women is unique in how she forges her own adaptive path in life and in writing.

Biographical Backgrounds and Literature Review

Much of the published criticism on the younger two authors, Wicomb and Allison, has appeared as individual essays, journal articles or chapters in larger works. Though piecemeal, the critical output on the two is steady and ongoing. Although there is continued interest in writing by Wicomb and Allison, fewer books of criticism of their work have been published. Wicomb and Allison are still in the process of creating their relatively small bodies of work, whereas McCullers and Head have left finite but quite prolific collections. As a result, there are far fewer dedicated books of criticism focussing on the writing of Wicomb and Allison, although the journal articles keep appearing. By contrast, in my research to date, I have come across numerous essays, chapters and reviews as well as monographs and critical anthologies devoted to Carson McCullers. While not as plentiful as criticism on McCullers, there

are many essays and chapters on Bessie Head as well as a number of monographs and books of criticism on her work. This pattern suggests that critics resist producing monographs until the writer's career appears to be in its closing stages or after the writer's death.

Carson McCullers: Writing Life and Critical Reception

An especially intriguing book is Judith Giblin James's *Wunderkind: The Reputation of Carson McCullers, 1940-1990* (1995) in which James incorporates the critical material of other reviewers and critics into a seamless academic conversation, positioning herself as a kind of Chairperson for discussion of decades' worth of McCullers criticism. By contrast, Clark and Friedman, *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers* (1996), are absent editors whose voices are only heard in an eleven page introduction provided as a rationale for their essay choices and as a means of contextualizing and summarizing the main idea of each contribution. With James's *Wunderkind*, however, as the date range in the subtitle implies 1940-1990, the author traces and comments on the evolution of critical opinion of McCullers and literary critical trends--from New Criticism to Queer Theory--that determined the lens through which she was being read at any given time. The entire volume is a compelling literature review spanning half a century.

In the section of Judith James's book about the reception of McCullers's first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) James points out the ways in which it is atypical of a young writer's first novel, saying that it was 'remarkable for its relative lack of autobiographical resonance' (9). According to James, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) better fits the pattern of a first novel's tendency towards autobiographical fiction/fictionalised autobiography. A very different perspective

comes from Virginia Spencer Carr who writes that McCullers's first 'novel reflects vividly the author's milieu in the 1930s and is her most autobiographical tale' (2005: 1).

When Carson McCullers's novel first came out, most reviewers were extremely enthusiastic about both *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and the youth of its author. According to James, this was a 'stunning first novel' (9). Edward D. McDonald said of the book and its writer, 'Genius is ageless – and here one faces nothing less'.¹⁵ A great deal of the early criticism of her first two novels, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941) paid as much attention to McCullers's youth as it did to the quality of her work. As a result of the overwhelmingly positive reviews of her first novel that McCullers, who had moved from the South to an apartment in Greenwich Village, New York, met *Harper's Bazaar* editor George Davis. Davis serialized *Reflections in a Golden Eye* in *Harper's Bazaar* a few months before it was published as a book. The unique and powerful quality of her writing as well as her apparently quirky joie-de-vivre must have endeared her to fellow writers, editors and publishers who embraced her as a friend and colleague. She seems not to have struggled to get her writing into print and in this, as a woman in the 1940s and 50s, she was the exception¹⁶. Certainly other personal and professional challenges were thrown up before her, but having her first four major novels published between 1940 and 1946 was not among them. Her fifth novel, *Clock Without Hands*, was published in 1961 to mixed critical reviews but generally popular success. By that time, McCullers's health was declining, her

¹⁵ McDonald wrote this in 1940 in "The Mirroring Stream of Fiction." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 16 (Autumn): 602-14

¹⁶ In her September 2000 article, 'A Rocky Road to Posterity: The Publication of Zora Neale Hurston', Christine Daley argues that Hurston's ups and downs with publication and reception mirrors that of most unconventional writing by women in the first half of the twentieth century, and was magnified because she was African American.

medical expenses were adding up and critical acclaim for her work was fluctuating.

While the play version of *The Member of the Wedding* (1950) was a Broadway success, her other attempts at playwriting failed.

It is interesting, in light of the South African-American South bifurcation of this thesis to read what Nadine Gordimer writes about meeting Carson McCullers. She says that their first meeting, at the Fifth Avenue hotel in New York, was

a frightening one: it was 1954, she had just recovered from a stroke, she was drinking a lot...and in place of glory I found suffering. We met again, over ten years, and those times I found a triumph of survival and an affection and warmth that can come only of joy in life—in spite of everything. But what she was like is of no importance, set against what she wrote. (134)

While literary critics focussed for years on the themes of loneliness, alienation and the Southern Gothic grotesque in McCullers's writing¹⁷ Gordimer observes that McCullers 'does speak of her belief in the "innately co-operative nature of people", and of the "unnatural social tradition making them behave" in ways counter to this' (136), particularly in regard to race relations in the South. Gordimer makes the connection between the concepts of brotherly love and race in her critique of McCullers's writing:

Finally, Carson McCullers was a white woman from the black South. Apart from the question of how the background in which she reiterates she felt rooted forever ... shaped *her*, how, in her work, does the love of man fare in the context of racial fear and contempt? [...] Yet if one returns to her work one sees that the reason why her blacks don't stand out of the page is because they are not "observed" from without, but are simply people presented, apparently from the same level of knowledge from which she presents whites. (136)

Gordimer sees similarities between the brutality of white South Africans towards blacks in her homeland and that of white Southerners towards African Americans. She is so immersed in coping with life under the system of

¹⁷ Such critics are referenced in Virginia Spencer Carr's book *Understanding Carson McCullers*.

apartheid and her own resistance to a society saturated with racism, that the greatest compliment she can pay McCullers is to say that she draws both black and white characters as ‘simply people presented’. Gordimer concludes her article by commenting that McCullers has brought the degradation of Southern racism ‘to life more devastatingly than [by] any black writer so far’ (137).

Plenty of readers and critics would take issue with this, but it represents Gordimer’s opinion at a time when few black writers were being published by mainstream US presses.

In his article, ‘Inner Landscape’, Richard Wright offers his much-quoted perspective on how McCullers writes about race:

To me the most impressive aspect of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race. This cannot be accounted for stylistically or politically; it seems to stem from an attitude to life which enables Miss McCullers to rise above the pressures of her environment and embrace white and black humanity in one sweep of apprehension and tenderness. (1940: 196)

This kind of praise reveals a preoccupation with the kind of person the author is, for example, compassionate, morally brave, insightful--as it is revealed in her writing. The attention paid to her character itself in early reviews often omits discussion of *where* her character was formed, other than very general references to her as a Southern writer, and by what influences. Later in this thesis I will explore in greater detail myths and theories of place and displacement as they affect the writer who leaves her original home.

Here, I will look briefly at place in the critical reception of McCullers’s later writing. One of the most comprehensive essays on this subject is Delma Eugene Presley’s ‘Carson McCullers and the South’ which appeared in *The Georgia Review* (1974). Two points are made here: one is that the quality of the author’s work

deteriorated over time and the other is that the cause for this failure can be found in how she responded as a writer to her self-imposed exile from the South. Presley concurs with Granville Hicks who wrote that the quality of McCullers's work declined after her first novel. Presley asks, 'Why the decline? Because her subsequent works depend almost entirely upon the imaginative use of language, and neglect the solid foundation of place... She continued to write about the South even though she did not live there—physically or spiritually... Carson McCullers could not recover the South in her fiction, because she left it before she really understood it' (108-9). Words Presley uses to describe *Square Root of Wonderful: A Play* (1958) and the novel *Clock Without Hands* (1961) include shallow, melodramatic, vacuous and trite. McCullers's struggle in her complicated relationship with the South was both the cause and the limitation of her achievement. Leaving a place one finds unbearable is more likely to open up creative possibilities for a writer than narrow them down.

McCullers's escape from the South led her to Brooklyn where she lived with her husband Reeves McCullers and a variety of other artists and writers in a bohemian boarding house arrangement presided over by W.H. Auden. Virginia Spencer Carr mentions that 'Carson became enamored of a Swiss novelist and morphine addict, Annemarie Clarac-Schwartzenbach' and that 'Reeves McCullers fell in love with composer David Diamond, living with him for five months in Rochester, New York' (9). According to Carr, Carson was considered a lesbian by her friends, and Mab Segrest, feminist writer and activist claims that McCullers acted out of 'lesbian alienation'. I take this to suggest that McCullers's standpoint would have been that of the outsider within straddling two realms, neither of which felt like home. While this biographical background may offer some insight into McCullers's personal connection to her many queer characters and themes, it does nothing to settle

arguments as to her rank among the best Southern women writers of the period like Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor or Katherine Anne Porter. Each is strikingly talented and unique.

Bessie Head: Writing Life and Critical Reception

While, according to Presley, exile diluted McCullers's effectiveness as a writer, it took a literal border-crossing from South Africa into Botswana to liberate Bessie Head and enable her to concentrate on her writing.

Gillian Eilersen's biography *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind her Ears* (1995) offers an interesting window into Head's personal circumstances and her writing life.¹⁸ While overtly political publications had narrow distribution because of strict censorship laws, prior to her exile, Bessie Head contributed to a commercially viable magazine, *Drum*, which is still in circulation in South Africa today. Many issues of *Drum* managed to escape censorship during apartheid possibly because its raunchy, populist aspects gave it the glossy appearance of sheer entertainment. In fact, after its heyday as the voice of a predominantly subaltern people from the 1950s to the 1980s, *Drum* evolved into the thing it had seemed to be—a rag. Not immediately obvious at first glance during the turbulent time in question was its political content. Those censors who did look past the cover photographs of bikini-clad women and sensationalist headlines found examples of photojournalism they perceived as politically subversive. The journalists and photographers who chronicled the brutal

¹⁸ I was surprised when reading this biography to find that I grew up a few blocks away from where Bessie Head attended high school in Durban, South Africa. I read her novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968) as a first year student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 1980. Prior to taking that English class, the apartheid system had so effectively accomplished its goal of racial segregation and government control in every area of life, I had been unaware that there were any published black South African women writers. With the synchronicity that happens when one becomes conscious of crucial information, I began to come across Bessie Head and other politically outspoken South African writers all at once, mostly through little literary magazines like *New Contrast*

injustices they saw all around them were sometimes detained without trial, as were hundreds of anti-apartheid activists, held for various periods of time in jail and/or banned, which meant they were prevented from all social or political contact and could only leave their homes in order to go to work. Photographer Peter Magubane¹⁹ was a *Drum* contributor who was punished in this way for his work:

The establishment of *Drum Magazine* in the 1950s, notwithstanding the newly-elected Nationalist Party's policy of Apartheid, reflected the dynamic changes that were taking place among the new urban Black South African—African, Indian and Coloured—communities. The magazine became an important platform for a new generation of writers and photographers who changed the way Black people were represented in society.²⁰

Most journalists were men, as were the majority of South Africa's published novelists and poets at that time. Nadine Gordimer was one of the very few activist women writers well-known within South Africa and abroad who published prolifically during (and after) the apartheid era. Several of her works were banned by the South African government for various periods of time and she was under surveillance by the secret police.²¹ At the very least, the Special Branch routinely tapped the telephones of 'subversives' and harassed them, at worst they arrested and detained suspects without trial, using brutal interrogation methods (Ross 2008: 150). Gordimer's fame overseas may have offered her some measure of protection inside South Africa. Most anti-apartheid writers, however, had to walk the tightrope of censorship regulations if they were going to be published and have distribution inside the country at all, so output was severely constrained by political factors.

(established in 1960 in association with the University of Cape Town) and *Staffrider* (established in 1978, published on a shoestring budget by Ravan Press).

¹⁹ John Cook writes about award-winning *Drum* photographer Peter Magubane and his arrest, torture and banning order in his article 'One-Man Truth Squad' in the June/July 1997 issue of *MotherJones* magazine

²⁰ South African History Online: Towards a People's History <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/drum-magazine> [Accessed 4 July 2012]

²¹ 'The Nobel Prize in Literature 1991: Nadine Gordimer' http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1991/ [Accessed 7 October 2010]

In spite of the hurdles to writing and publication, particularly for an anti-government coloured woman, Bessie Head persevered at making writing her career. She worked as a journalist in Johannesburg and Cape Town from 1958 to 1960, writing for magazines and newspapers targeting black and coloured readership. She wrote her novella *The Cardinals* while living in Cape Town in 1961 and 1962 and it was around this time that she married coloured political activist and fellow journalist, Harold Head. She detested apartheid and found the repressive atmosphere of codified racial hatred and its resulting paranoia a very real hindrance to her creativity and her sanity. Head's fragile psychological state can be read into the circumstances and state of mind of the protagonist in *The Cardinals*--Mouse, a mixed race young woman journalist whose character is clearly autobiographical. According to Eilersen's biography (55), Head gave the manuscript to a friend soon after she had written it and it resurfaced thirty years later. The novella was published posthumously in 1993 with seven other short pieces in *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*, edited by Margaret Daymond. The unusual generic mixture of the book merits some discussion and I will address this later. So, although *The Cardinals* may be considered Head's first foray into longer fiction, it was her last publication and was relatively well received, despite some stylistic drawbacks, as she had by then built up a significant international readership.

The road to the publication of Head's first published novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, was very different. It is inappropriate here to delve too deeply into the specific circumstances of her turbulent first few years in Botswana where she arrived with her baby, Howard, in early 1964, but some context is necessary to appreciate the trajectory of her body of work. Head took a teaching job in Serowe, but that ended after she accused the principal of sexual harassment, bit him and fled screaming. She

refused to submit to a mental health evaluation. She and Howard lived in a series of mud huts or tin shacks first on an internationally funded experimental farm and later in Francistown. Between odd jobs, she relied on the help of white friends. I mention their race because she would vacillate between absolute hatred of white people and the notion that race is irrelevant and our common humanity is everything.²²

During this time, Head published some short pieces. These included articles in the East African journal *The New African*, one in *Transition* and an article that would lead to unexpected opportunities, 'The Woman from America', which appeared in August 1966 in the British paper, *The New Statesman*. An editor at Simon & Schuster, New York, read this last-mentioned article and struck up correspondence with Head, sending her an \$80 advance in December 1966 'on a book they wanted her to write' (Eilersen: 93). The result would be *When Rain Clouds Gather*, published in New York and London 1969. Eilersen synthesizes the early reviews as follows:

The *Times Literary Supplement* called it an 'intelligent and moving novel'.²³ The *New Statesman*, however, found its 'naked sociological commentary' overdone: 'There is too much undiluted sociological and agricultural textbook language, but the book is justified by loving and humorous descriptions of African land and people, by powerful, generous feeling and passionate analysis of the position of the black African.'²⁴ The only review Bessie liked was the one which appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. Dominic Le Foe said: 'Her book is not only a fine literary performance, it is a remarkable service performed for her race. Its publication may well be remembered as a moment of significance in the evolution of modern Africa and her relationship with the rest of the world. It deserves that distinction.' (111)

In her chapter on *When Rain Clouds Gather* in the critical collection edited by Maxine Sample (2003), Maureen Fielding writes about the traumas of colonization, patriarchy, tribalism, racism and motherlessness and the ways in which Head portrays

²² Biographical details come from Eilersen's book (110-112) and from M.J. Daymond's introduction to *The Cardinals* (viii-xiv).

²³ 'Three Kinds of Trauma', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29.5. (1969: 575)

²⁴ Borg, *New Statesman*, 16.5. (1969: 696)

communal agricultural work, especially planting and tending crops as a healing process. The uprooted exile can create something Edenic by literally and metaphorically establishing new roots for herself and a bond with others working together to grow food. Fielding says of this list of traumatic systems cited above, ‘*When Rain Clouds Gather* includes a cast of traumatized characters dealing with the effect of one or more of these systems. In one way or another these characters’ recoveries are connected to agriculture and the transformation of the land’ (14). In the same collection, the editor, Sample, has a chapter entitled ‘Space: An Experiential Perspective: Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*’ in which she writes of the dispossession of black South Africans and establishes a link to the concept of existential belonging, material belongings, structuring space (the physical landscape) and the self through healing growth. Sample shows Head’s narrative arc in this novel as beginning with deracination and moving full circle to putting down roots on the other side of the border.

While Head’s first published novel ends with the possibility of cohesive resolution, her subsequent novels reveal a kind of unravelling or teasing out of thematic strands that increasingly obsess her. *Maru* is a novel about love, racism, the problematics of power, good and evil and the supernatural. There are many autobiographical elements in the novel especially in Head’s apparent identification with the young Margaret. Initially commissioned by Simon & Schuster to write a children’s book--which *Maru* is obviously not--Head’s manuscript was turned down by them, however her agent sent it to Gollancz in London who accepted it right away. *Maru* was published in New York by McCall in 1971. Thus her first two novels were picked up by overseas publishers relatively quickly.

The critical focus on *Maru* has been largely on the unsatisfactory deployment of the marriage between a Masarwa (Bushman) woman and a Motswana man as a contrived solution to the problem of black-on-black racism in Botswana. Both Cecil Abrahams and Daniel Gover (*Tragic Life*, 1990) refer to the naive, fairy-tale ending even though the path leading to the marriage between Maru and Margaret is fraught with problems caused by power disymmetry--racism, sexism, tribalism—and the marriage does *not* represent a happy ending. Colette Guldemann suggests that ‘there is a more productive way of reading the “uncertainty” that the end of *Maru* continually evokes...[I]t should be read ... as an indication of a far more complex relationship between race and gender than the “happy” ending can account for. Paying attention to textual factors that account for this “uncertainty” will reveal that far from having a romantic resolution, *Maru* is, in fact, a radical subversion of the romance genre...’ (Guldemann in Sample 2003 : 48) The problematic sexual politics in the novel, raised among others by Ketu Katrak (2006), support Guldemann’s explication that

[t]he real new world to which Head points lies not in the society represented in the prolepsis, but in the creative freedom and force of Margaret’s paintings and the level of cosmic creativity she seems to inaugurate through which the characters become engaged in a process of recreating each other. *Maru* thus begins to suggest that when black women have this space, they will begin to show us all other ways of creating (their selves and ours). (Guldemann in Sample : 66)

Zoë Wicomb, who sees Bessie Head as a kind of literary forebear, approaches the problems raised by *Maru* in terms of the ways in which images, whether they are dreams or paintings, are explained and thereby changed by words, whether those words are thought, written or spoken:

In representation we find a key to deconstructing the marginal-central casting of race and gender--both the heroine's relation to representing as well as to being represented. She paints her dream, which, in fact, is a projection of her powerful suitor's desire, and which later, when he sweeps her off into marriage, is translated into reality. But by separating

the scene of his desire into discrete paintings, in other words by denying the unity of the composition, she disrupts the realisation of his dreams. Head clandestinely represents the heroine's resistance to total subjugation through creating a space in which she could insert inventions of her own, representing her own desires. The Masarwas' racial liberation, which her marriage to the Batswana chief promises, can thus not be secured without resolving her identity as woman. (1990 : 43)

Visual representation or fine art triumphs in this instance by providing material that elicits verbal deconstruction, disallowing Maru's agenda for Margaret and opening a space for Margaret's creativity. Wicomb's interpretation is a masterful retort to some critics' discomfort with the supposedly happy ending or others' confusion and disappointment at Head's perceived sacrificing of her Masarwa heroine to Batswana patriarchy. Wicomb's alternative reading, with its unexpected link to ekphrasis²⁵ is far more satisfying to the feminist critic.

In the period after completing *Maru* and before writing *A Question of Power*, Head began an exploration of the religions of the world which led to her notion of herself as 'part of a soul drama, a new act of the eternal conflict between good and evil' (Eilersen: 129). Her obsession with God, the Devil and sin intensified during this time. She suffered from headaches, depression, chronic insomnia and paranoia, eventually suffering a complete psychotic break leading to her admission to a mental hospital in Lobatse for several months in 1971 (Eilersen). Head was released but continued to suffer with mental illness. She began making notes about her thoughts and hallucinations; these notes evolved into her third novel *A Question of Power*, which she finished writing in April 1972. This disturbing book has been the focus of most of the scholarship on Bessie Head. Head's literary agent, Hilary Rubinstein,

and Giles Gordon at Gollancz, found the manuscript too problematic to publish as it was. After several months of correspondence with various discouraging parties, the novel was published in 1973 by Davis-Poynter of London and Pantheon, New York.

Head provides her own assessment of *A Question of Power* in her body of work in the book edited by Abrahams. It is interesting to note that in *The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa* (Abrahams (ed.) 1990), Bessie Head herself is included amongst the twelve writers who contributed to this collection of essays. After his brief introduction, Abrahams places Head's 'Social and Political Pressures that Shape Literature in Southern Africa' before the next ten essays. This editorial strategy contextualizes the papers that follow, most of which provide analyses of the novels *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1973). Head's subheading for her paragraph about her third novel is 'Patterns of Evil'. She provides a transnational and personal link:

I argued that people and nations do not realise the point at which they become evil; but once trapped in its net, evil has a powerful propelling motion into a terrible abyss of destruction. I argued that its form, design, and plan could be clearly outlined and that it was little understood as a force in the affairs of mankind. (15)

On the one hand, the author sees national systems like apartheid or other forms of fascism as part of a public pattern of evil that is not publicly acknowledged as evil. Fascism is something organised, planned, bureaucratised and carefully executed, hence the word 'pattern'. On the other hand, in describing her own experience with the perceived evil of mental illness, she refers to 'an intensely personal and private

²⁵ Many scholars make use of James Heffernan's general conception of ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of visual representation' (1993: 3).

dialogue’ and ‘a private philosophical journey to the sources of evil’—an apparently chaotic descent made most nightmarish by its arbitrariness. Even her schizophrenic apprehensions of evil as simultaneously systematic and random reveal the fight she sees as taking place within her for her soul. The connection she makes shows how an insane system can generate insanity in its people.

Various scholars have written about the madness inherent in colonialism and the ways in which colonisers othered the racialised people they colonised, women and those they labelled degenerate. In ‘Double Crossings: Madness, Sexuality and Imperialism’, Anne McClintock talks about

madness in the colonies: not the mad as another race, but other races as mad... if the mentally ill in the metropolis were seen as racial degenerates, how were mentally ill people in the colonies to be figured? A well-established European tradition held that madness was a condition of exile. The mentally ill were not physically confined, but were banished beyond the walls of the town ... [i]n the metropolis, then, I suggest, the mad were racialised: in Africa, the Africans were figured as mad. (McClintock 1990: 17-19)

Within this colonial world view described by McClintock is the idea of the ‘normally abnormal’, a category to which most Africans would have belonged and the abnormal abnormal which describes a ‘mad or sick African’ (23). If exile and the ship of fools used to be the way of banishing the mentally ill and criminally insane centuries ago, by the nineteenth century ‘carceral and custodial’ asylums were being instituted in Africa. In her essay, McClintock explains that

in the beginning of colonialism [African women were] regarded as not capable of mental illness; they were figured as being too lacking in psychological complexity ... [but] by the early decades of the twentieth century, women were on the move, travelling from the rural areas to the cities, under pressure of rural devastation, famine and the allure of the towns...Madness became a discourse of territoriality. For African women, to be mad was to be out of place...[t]o be a woman alone, a woman without a man, was itself a pathology, a personality disorder. (26-7)

In the repressive convergence of tribal and European cultures, a woman travelling with a child, beyond the jurisdiction of her father or husband, would have been considered 'stray' and therefore mad. The title of Bessie Head's collection of essays, *A Woman Alone*, published posthumously, encapsulates that very fraught notion. It is all the more poignant because of the author's tortured mental state. Later in this thesis I will interrogate the ramifications of a woman being seen or seeing herself as out of place. Consciousness of liminality and exilic states informs my analysis of the literature.

Early analyses of *A Question of Power* focus on the autobiographical similarities between the author and the protagonist Elizabeth who were coloured single mothers living in Botswana who experienced nervous breakdowns. Arthur Ravenscroft (1976) raises the question of whether or not a writer who had not experienced the horrors of Head's breakdown could so authentically invent the story. He decided that there is ultimately 'no confusion of identity between the novelist and the character' (179). My opinion is that both *Maru* and *A Question of Power* blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography; they fall on the spectrum that ranges between generic poles, neither at one end nor the other. To read *A Question of Power* as fictionalised autobiography rather than wholly fiction or autobiography is to dismiss pronouncements by some critics of the work's universality. The problem here is a Eurocentric view of tragedy, after Aristotle's definition, perceived as universal. Taking an individual's specific fictionalised experience and circumstances as such helps to avoid generalising the ungeneralisable. I would argue that because Bessie Head's experience of a nervous breakdown was uniquely her own, acknowledging the

autobiographical aspect of the book helps avert any essentialising, universalising impulse one may have towards the anguish of mental illness. Jacqueline Rose (1996) interrogates the terms ‘universality’ and ‘madness’ in *A Question of Power* in an attempt to avoid ‘reproducing the epistemological privilege of the West’ in examining authors from the global South and elsewhere.²⁶ Earl Ingersoll takes Rose’s notion one step further to include an examination of the problematics of applying the Western construct of the tragic to Head’s work.

In my chapter on Self-Representation, I will examine more closely the many facets of life writing to foreground the unreliability of both memory and language and the impulse to forge a narrative to fit the writer’s purpose. Later critical work moves beyond the question of the extent of the autobiographical nature of the work. The personal and political issues around madness in the novel continue to be addressed through psychoanalytical readings and the psychology of trauma and oppression. Exile and postcolonialism are significant themes of many papers on this book.

In his 1991 article published in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Paul Lorenz actually cautions his reader in his introductory paragraph to appreciate the complexity of ‘any novel...which attempts to present a cure for the cultural psychosis which is the result of colonization in real, personal, tangible terms’ (592). I disagree with Lorenz that the novel is attempting to present a cure. Rather, it is a creative recounting of what Francoise Lionnet (1993) calls ‘a geography of pain’ and the survival of the protagonist in that landscape of mental anguish. Physical and psychic pain are thought to be inexpressible in

²⁶ Jacqueline Rose’s essay from her collection *States of Fantasy* is quoted in Earl Ingersoll’s essay ‘The Universality of tragedy? The Case of Bessie Head’ (1999).

words, yet Head manages to describe her struggle with the discrepancy between her reality and the generally agreed upon reality of the people around her. Granted, reality may vary depending on its cultural construction, especially given the racialised postcolonial circumstances of being a coloured exile, a woman alone, from South Africa trying to adapt to accepted codes of behaviour in Botswana. But Head did emerge well enough to express the apparently inexpressible in words. To become well enough, though, is not to be fully healed. Survival is not necessarily synonymous with cure of the afflicted individual or nation.

Patrick Colm Hogan's 'Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*: A Lacanian Psychosis' examines psychosis as a way of understanding the link between individual and social identities.²⁷ Bessie Head's treatment of identity and place is especially compelling in her third novel. Having her protagonist experience a different reality enables Head to reveal the extent to which there is no singular, unified, fixed identity that is assigned for life to an individual, and this is a stance I also take in the rest of the thesis. While most papers on the novel focus on Elizabeth, Sello and Dan, Anissa Talahite (2005) introduces Kenosi, Elizabeth's female friend who 'brings together some of the novel's central themes about the body, fertility, and creation' (152). Talahite points out the way in which

Elizabeth expresses her desire for Kenosi in conventional heterosexual language ('If I were a man I'd surely marry you'), therefore emphasizing the fact that even desire is a construction inherited from the myths by which we live, in this instance marriage (90)...It is constructed in the novel as a space where women can desire each other outside the controlling gaze of patriarchy. (153)

²⁷ Maxine Sample (2003) in her chapter 'Bessie Head: A Bibliographic Essay' refers to Hogan's Lacanian analysis which emphasizes the 'psychological depth of the novel and the structure and meaning of Elizabeth's delusions' (133).

Head's attitude towards sexuality, especially homosexuality is tortured. She hates her own corporeality and wishes she could deny the body in order to nurture the spirit, in the tradition of ascetics who aspire towards higher morality. The struggle between good and evil plays an enormous part in this drama and Elizabeth's epiphany is that nobody (no body) or force in the universe is entirely good or evil, and, to her shock, she realises that she is capable of evil, too. This difficult novel has resisted readings because of its experimental style and great complexity; there are simply so many threads to tease out in analysing the work. A queer reading would be productive because Elizabeth's obsession with morality encompasses her fixation on how sexuality is expressed or repressed. Helen Kapstein (2003) makes some inroads into this project when she writes of Head, 'despite her homophobia, she manages to present a powerful challenge to cultural and state prohibitions by equating cross-dressing with the purposeful disruption of normative categories...[b]ut even as she tries to salvage a space of possible resistance, her use of the language of disease and depravity signals her ambivalence about sexuality and race' (Kapstein in Sample: 84).

Early in the novel Elizabeth identifies as masculine and denies identification with blacks. She aligns herself with the white male moral subject. 'But although she rejects the body to reject blackness and femaleness, this rejection proves untenable' (Sue J. Kim 2008: 57). Kim points out that Elizabeth's 'real neurotic break occurs not when Dan assails her femininity, but when he mentions gay men. Elizabeth, then unable to take refuge in her disembodied moral subject, must recognize her own body in sudden outbursts that seem to come from nowhere' (55). Rather than being asexual, as she

sometimes asserts in the novel, I maintain that Elizabeth is highly sexually charged and her mental state magnifies her consciousness of sexuality all around and within her, which I shall show in later chapters.

Zoë Wicomb: Critical Approaches

The next step is to move forward in time to the work of Zoe Wicomb, herself a coloured South African writer whose first book, a story sequence called *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, was published in 1987, the year after Bessie Head died. As of this writing, there is not yet a monograph or major volume that constitutes a collection of critical essays on the works of Zoe Wicomb, neither have I been able to find a current bibliographic article or comprehensive biographical piece detailing the process of publishing and the reception of Wicomb's body of work, although I expect that these are imminent due to increased interest in her work over the last two years as evidenced by three dedicated international conferences. Rob Gaylard's²⁸ essay-length entry on Zoe Wicomb in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: South African Writers* was published in 2000, so although definitely worth reading, it only addresses the author's first book, the short story cycle.

Scholarly articles on Wicomb have been appearing with increasing regularity in the past dozen years. The closest thing to an edited critical compilation in book form would be the five articles assembled in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2010. This cluster stems from a one-day colloquium, *Zoë Wicomb: Texts & Histories*, held in London in September 2008 with a follow-up conference at the University of Stellenbosch in April

2010, *The Cape & the Cosmopolitan: Reading Zoë Wicomb*. The series was rounded off with a third conference called *Zoë Wicomb & the Translocal: Scotland and South Africa* at the University of York in September 2012. A special double issue of *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* (2011) includes eight articles based on papers delivered at the Stellenbosch conference.

Before discussing this flurry of very recent scholarship on Wicomb's work, I would like to sketch out some background about the circumstances of her growing up in the western Cape, her education in South Africa and the United Kingdom, and the beginning of her writing career. The point here is that her highly unusual access to an excellent education and proficiency in the English language, both rare for coloured girls, positioned her to maximise her very substantial creative and intellectual talent. Next, I will look at the critical reception of her books and the growing interest in her as an innovative, genre-bending writer.

Zoë Wicomb was born in 1948 in a remote Griqua settlement named Beeswater near Vredendal in the Little Namaqualand region of the Western Cape. Zoe is the daughter of Robert Wicomb, a schoolteacher, and Rachel Le Fleur Wicomb, who died when Zoë was young. Although most Cape coloureds spoke Afrikaans as their first language, her parents placed a high value on English and education as ways to improve one's lot in apartheid-era South Africa. Zoë attended an English-medium high school in Cape Town, about four hundred kilometres away from home, and after that the University of the Western Cape, designated for coloured students. She left for England on

²⁸ Rob Gaylard, *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 225: South African Writers* (ed. Paul Scanlon), Detroit: Gale, 2000. There is a one paragraph update posted on April 19, 2002 introducing

graduating in 1970 and continued her education at Reading University and then the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. She embarked on a career of teaching and writing while in exile. She returned to South Africa in 1990 and taught at the University of the Western Cape for three years before going back to Scotland. Even after choosing to leave South Africa and the atmosphere which effectively silenced black voices, Wicomb had great difficulty in writing overseas. In an interview published in *Between the Lines II*²⁹, 1993, she says, ‘The subtle British racism made me feel it would be presumptuous of me to write and even to speak ... so that I was thoroughly and successfully silenced by the English educational system. It took a very long time, and immense effort, to find my voice’.

Rob Gaylard (1996) seems to conflate the author and the protagonist, Frieda, when he suggests that the story sequence, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, ‘can be read as a sustained interrogation of Frieda’s attempts to define or negotiate her identity, and to find a place which she can call home’. But as he makes his argument, it becomes clear that Gaylard is stressing a different point, that while Wicomb wrote the book in exile in England, ‘[w]hat is remarkable is the almost complete absence of any attempt to represent Frieda’s experience of exile. The years spent in the U.K. form the fulcrum—the absent, undramatized centre—around which the collection turns’ (1996: 178). The writer’s exilic state, her distance from home, helped her to focus on recreating that home through words. Her immediate surroundings and circumstances in the U.K. appear to have enabled her to creatively access places she knew so well, Namaqualand and Cape Town. She accomplished this from the quite

Wicomb’s first novel, *David’s Story*, published in 2000.

different cultural and physical space she occupied halfway across the earth from home. It is noteworthy that Wicomb writes mostly about South Africa while living in the U.K., and McCullers and Allison also write about the places they came from after having moved away. Bessie Head, however, wrote mostly about Botswana where she lived in exile.

In *Imaginary Homelands* (1992), Salman Rushdie theorises about the exiled writer's sense of loss and his or her reclaiming what was lost by creating fictional settings similar to those left behind. In order to create a new sense of home in a foreign place, the writer in exile writes a version of the remembered, fictionalised yet also autobiographical home while living in a new land. If this is the case, Zoë Wicomb has not followed an established pattern, but forged her own version as only a nomadic thinker and writer can. From her first published work until the present, Wicomb's discourse has been characterised by a kind of intellectual subversion of expected conventions. She mines her own lived experience for the material of the stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, yet rejects its categorisation as autobiography. In the interview with Eva Hunter (1993), Wicomb comments: '... black women are supposed to write autobiography – whether they write in the third person or not, they're always received as if it's autobiographical, almost as if we're incapable of artifice, incapable of fictionalising. That irritates me intensely' (Hunter & McKenzie: 93). Speaking at an Oxford conference entitled 'Literature from Another South Africa'³⁰, Wicomb set forth her preference for literature that offers the reader 'the experience of discontinuity, ambiguity,

²⁹ Eva Hunter interviewed Zoe Wicomb on 5 June 1990 in Cape Town as part of what would be a publication for the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown.

violation of our expectations' ('An Author's Agenda', 1990). Referring to 'the novel of theory'—Wicomb being a theoretical writer and a novelist—Michael Greaney points out that 'for all their fascination with intellectual radicalism, these novels tend to be constructed with a keen sense of the pleasures of convention, even if those conventions are being playfully reinvented' (2006: 157-8). This approach is applicable to Wicomb's short stories, too. One of her strategies for generic and other disruption is to have narrator and protagonist Frieda Shenton's mother alive in the first story, dead for the intervening stories, and then alive again in the final story while the father has died in this last piece. The stories are arranged in chronological order thus notions of autobiography or a traditionally structured novel in connected episodes are toppled.

In addition to refusing the label of autobiography, the book confounded some early critics who could not decide if it was a fragmented novel or a collection of related short stories. Sue Marais (1995) elaborates on this generic confusion and this will be interrogated in detail in Chapter 1. My own preference is for story cycle, although 'cycle' misleadingly suggests a kind of closure which is noticeably absent in the work. Perhaps the best metaphor to describe the structure of this book is a nomadic journey, uncharted and unchartable, or even a twisting rhizome. This suggests that the structure mirrors the theory I employ later in the analytical portion of my thesis. Wicomb is very conscious of interweaving theory and fiction. Nomadic theory is conscious of unexpected twists and turns just like those in a book of fiction where the mother is dead in the second story and very much alive and disgruntled in the last story. Here and in Wicomb's later work,

³⁰ In 'An Author's Agenda' first published in the *South African Review of Books* in 1990 Wicomb stated that she writes from a political position as, amongst other things, a South African and a black feminist.

Michael Greaney's intriguing question about a new confluence arises, of 'a creative intermingling of discourses that dissolves the traditional boundaries between literary text and critical metalanguage' (2006: 3).

Wicomb refuses a mythical master South African narrative. She addresses the transitional apartheid/post-apartheid disintegration of the monolithic stories of polarisation, suffering and exile that seemed to be required of South African writers, just as the Gothic is expected of southern US writers. Wicomb subverts expectations of the confessional or realistic fiction that had been coming out of South Africa for years and, in fact, draws attention to the fictiveness of her writing as a way of showing, as she put it in her article title, the variety of discourses. She shows that the South African story is nuanced, not only either about victims or perpetrators, wholly good or evil.

Zoë Wicomb claims that:

The search for a literary/cultural theory to suit the South African situation must surely take as a point of departure a conflictual model of society where a variety of discourses will always render problematic the demands of one in relation to others and where discursive formations admit of cracks and fissures that will not permit monolithic ideological constructs. (1990: 36)³¹

This approach resonates with the nomadism put forward by feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti and which will inform my analysis of some of the stories from the *Cape Town* cycle as well as the other close readings in my thesis. Especially interesting in the reading of Wicomb's stories and earlier articles is the extent to which nomadism as a theory that had yet to be more fully formulated and labelled is incipient and complementary to Wicomb's fiction and ideas. In a 1996 article, Dorothy Driver points out that 'Wicomb's

³¹ This quotation is from Wicomb's article entitled 'To Hear the Variety of Discourses' and is helpful to an understanding of both the story cycle *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and her novel, *David's Story*.

collection proclaims itself as a space of writing, where writing signifies not order but disorder, not authority but dissidence, not stereotype but difference’.

Disruptions and interrogations are characteristic of a nomadic consciousness where physical migration may or may not be a part of the reality described but a flexible intellectual demeanour is always required on the part of the actor. Braidotti’s agenda is to propagate the kind of theory that ultimately leads to social justice, so that thinking, talking and writing about anti-racism, anti-capitalism, anti-sexism can, in fact, help to further the cause of civil rights for everyone. Although she does not refer to it as nomadism, Dorothy Driver shows how this works in the *Cape Town* story cycle. ‘The self-knowledge with which Wicomb imbues many of her major characters involves their active engagement with their world rather than their being passive victims of hegemonic control...Jan Klinkies (a quirky coloured uncle who lives in a desolate, abandoned part of Namaqualand) himself takes on the creative role of meaning-maker; an active and dissident engagement with the history that has been imposed on him gives a new meaning to his existence’ (50). Wicomb seems to hold in one hand-- testing its weight, shape, consistency and feel--the notion of individual self-identity and in the other hand she weighs identification/s and connections with other people. Taken together, by destabilizing and decentring the subject, as Driver puts it, the effect is that the ‘social cross-currents or webbing of identity are recognised rather than repressed within the text and often comprise the characters’ self-representations’. If, as Braidotti suggests, the subject is always and already constituted as plural and fragmented then the multiplicity of Wicomb’s characters’ subjectivities and their multivocality reveal not only the variety of discourses applicable to the South African situation, but the variety of truths that a fiction writer can choose to tell or not tell.

Wicomb's first forays into fragmentary, postmodernist structure resulted in the story cycle *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, published to wide acclaim. Her first novel, and it *is* a novel, *David's Story*, was published by Kwela Books, Cape Town, in 2000 and by the Feminist Press at the City University of New York in 2001. It is a challenging work not least because it shifts back and forth in time and is deliberately unreliably told. The action takes place in South Africa 1991 and is narrated by an unknown female amanuensis about the life of the protagonist, David Dirkse. David is a coloured anti-apartheid activist who has commissioned the (to the reader) unseen, unknown writer to write his story and include in it the apparent discoveries he makes as he researches his Griqua ancestry. Episodes set in Cape Town and Kokstad in 1991 are interspersed with those set in the 19th and early 20th centuries among David's Griqua ancestors, apparently chronicling their history and their leader, Griqua Chief Andrew le Fleur's deluded nationalistic aspirations for his people. The novel's complexity is magnified by its mixing of historical representation with imagined events and motivations, unreliable memory, clippings from local newspaper archives and an old, racist volume by a colonist offering his version of the lives and habits of the Griqua people.

Dorothy Driver's essay-length afterword illuminates *David's Story*. She provides the necessary historical and political background for the reader and addresses the intertextuality of Wicomb's work. In so doing, she shows the intricate web of connections to a variety of other writings, including those that reveal the postcolonial stance of writing back to oppression. She

emphasises the author's use of irony throughout and the mapping onto each other of memory, 'reality' and fiction.

When it arrived on the bookshelves, *David's Story* was called among other things 'a tremendous achievement and a huge step in the remaking of the South African novel' by J. M. Coetzee, and '[a] delicate, powerful novel' by Gayatri Spivak. It was lauded as groundbreaking by Library Journal reviewer, Ann Irvine, and New York Times Book Review contributor, Tom Beer called it 'a kaleidoscopic book—its story is fragmented and colorful, its focus continuously shifting'.³² The novel was the 2001 winner of South Africa's prestigious M-Net Literary Prize. With all this said, however, Zoe Wicomb recalls in an interview that until she found publishing houses (in New York and South Africa) for her novel :

[p]ublishers didn't like it. Too "postmodern", they said, stick with the voice of Frieda Shenton; too complex, let David tell his own story in the first person. If it's theory-driven (the worst criticism for a writer!) then I'm not sure what the theory is. For me it was simply a struggle, not only with the aesthetics of combining two stories, but also the ethics of representing the ambiguities of the situations. I dealt with that problem as best I could through a fragmented, indeterminate narrative, and a narrator whose voice is arch, ironic, unsympathetic. Hardly radical—it is after all a generic condition of prose fiction (as Bakhtin pointed out) to be multivoiced; in this case I draw attention to the different voices.³³

Although Wicomb disavows the book's radicalism, it is, as J. M. Coetzee says, 'a huge step in the remaking of the South African novel' and I contend that it should be acknowledged as pathbreaking, innovative, and therefore, radical. It is also radical in the rhizomatic, nomadic sense of its unexpected twists and turns. This is why it took time and tenacity to find the right publishers in South Africa and abroad.

³² The quotes by Ann Irvine and Tom Beer are from Rob Gaylard's 2002 entry for Zoe Wicomb in Contemporary Authors Online, Gale. Comments by J. M. Coetzee and Gayatri Spivak are from the back dustjacket of The Feminist Press edition of the novel.

David's Story has generated numerous scholarly journal articles. One that effectively peels away many of the novel's layers for closer examination is 'Zoe Wicomb's Home Truths: Place, genealogy, and identity in *David's Story*' by Derek Attridge, one of the foremost scholars of the notoriously avant-garde James Joyce. This 2005 article takes into account the fact that Wicomb may have been better able to write about Griqua/coloured identity, the liberation struggle during the transition from apartheid to democracy and about place because she wrote this novel in Glasgow. In this case, Attridge may be right, but Wicomb has said that she could not have written the novel the way she wanted to had she not actually 'come home' to South Africa for a few years in the early 1990s and experienced the turmoil of the political transition first hand. In an interview with Hein Willemse quoted by Attridge, Wicomb has ambiguous things to say about her physical distance from South Africa: 'I don't know whether that distance affords me any freedom. I really doubt it because I'm in denial about living abroad ... I suddenly realized I can't be a writer and keep on living in Scotland. I can't continue living on childhood experiences. A good third of *David's Story* is based on childhood experiences: people I've known, people I've spoken to. You can't go on writing if you're not living close to the place that you're writing about' (Willemse: 151). Yet, as Attridge points out, she has continued to live in Scotland and has continued to write. It seems to me that her irreconcilable feelings about the fissure between home and away, belonging and exclusion, are reflected in the gaps and cracks she builds into her fiction. At the heart of the dilemma is the puzzle of what constitutes a coloured South African identity during and after apartheid's

³³ From 'Zoe Wicomb interviewed on writing and nation' by Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver.

programme of racial categorisation. This fragmentation is evident in how Wicomb forms her characters' identities and subjectivities. David's search often feels as if it is Wicomb's, too.

Attridge goes on to point out the ways in which an individual, whether writer or character or both, is compelled to 'seek for a historical and genealogical grounding for one's sense of identity, even as it offers a telling critique of such enterprises' (159). He cites examples of this in four South African novels published in 2000 referring to work by writers who would have been labelled Afrikaans, Xhosa, English, and, in Wicomb's case, Griqua. The novels he refers to³⁴ take the long perspective, narratives about the people and their origins, be they indigenous, colonisers or migrants, centuries prior to the advent of apartheid (1948 – 1994) and moving into the challenges of post-apartheid South Africa. These novels reflect 'a need to complicate the myths of purity, linearity, and separation on which apartheid was founded' (159) and, in terms of one of the 'roles of the postcolonial novel ... to rewrite official history in order to reveal what has been occluded by it' (161). *David's Story* is, therefore, certainly a postcolonial novel and has been called postmodern by many critics, but Attridge argues that it derives most of the technical resources it exploits from the modernist tradition. Finally, I agree with Attridge's overall assessment of *David's Story* as 'one of the most original, powerful, and important South African novels of the post-apartheid era' (160).

To return to the core issue of coloured identity in *David's Story*, it is interesting to read J U Jacobs's 2008 article on the subject which he views through the lens of postcolonialist diasporic chaos theory. The struggle in the

³⁴ Derek Attridge writes about the search for identity and its connection to genealogy in novels by Etienne van Heerden, Zakes Mda, Elleke Boehmer and Zoë Wicomb.

novel is the result of contradictory tensions between the desire for a unified cultural identity based on what coloured South Africans have in common and the simultaneous consciousness of very different, separate histories in what is fallaciously known as '*the coloured community*'. Jacobs sums up the main features of the diasporic experience (which he takes from Fludernik, 2003) as including among other things, traumatic dispersal from the homeland or colonial emigration; a collective idealisation of the homeland and its culture; a wish to return; a strong ethnic group consciousness; a troubled relationship with the host society; solidarity with other expatriates, and more. But this generalised model does not seem applicable to David or his ancestors whose 'mixed heritage story started "at the Cape with Eva/Krotoa, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle"' (Wicomb 2000:1) in the seventeenth century' (Jacobs: 7). Jacobs does allow in his article that 'a different diasporic paradigm might be needed to approach coloured identity in South Africa' but he does not offer one. He does reference Minoli Salgado's chaos complexity theory as a way of understanding modern migration and the 'cultural conditions and identities it creates' (10). The main principles of this theory are quite complementary to nomadic theory with its basis in the metaphor of the rhizome. Principles include that chaos is a form of generative disorder, chaotic systems are nonlinear or multidirectional and chaotic trajectories are irreversible and unforeseen. Salgado's theory applied to David's genealogy (and his connection to Griqua history) is enlightening as to the multiplicity of originary strands that go into forming his identity. What is unsettling, however, is that the fiction that constitutes nationalism and the gaps and unreliability of memory and, therefore, of history itself, call into question the authenticity of

David's identity and national identity. David himself says of coloureds, 'We don't know what we are; the point is that in a place where everything gets distorted, no one knows who he is' (Wicomb 2000: 29).

The question of identity in David's case should be asked in the context of a discussion about texts and histories. Dorothy Driver, in her essay, 'The Struggle over the Sign: Writing and History in Zoë Wicomb's Art' argues that 'Wicomb stages a deconstruction of the standard oppositions between fiction and reality, truth and lie, history and text, ... a deconstruction in which her readers participate. Her ends are political, they are also aesthetic; in her art, there is no difference'. Driver shows how Wicomb dissolves barriers between apparent binaries. My reading of much of Wicomb's writing is with a similar consciousness of a range or a spectrum rather than absolutes. This discussion loops back to the conversation about texts and histories because both rely necessarily on narration, a notoriously slippery endeavour. In addition, it is important to consider that the telling of 'what happened' links memory, subjectivity, and the materiality of the body, and all of this remembering and recreating must take into account dual understandings of space and time, now and then, here and there. Embodied memory and location are key to unravelling history, text and identity as they manifest in *David's Story* and in Zoë Wicomb's second novel, *Playing in the Light*.

Playing in the Light was published in 2006 by Umuzi in South Africa and The New Press, New York. Embodied memory and location profoundly affect the protagonist, Marion, as she migrates along the rhizomatic passageways of the racialised, gendered self. She travels literally within the Cape and to England, and metaphorically, as she negotiates her shifting sense

of identity having been brought up white in apartheid-era South Africa, only to discover well into adulthood that her parents had been ‘playing white’ and would have been classified coloured had they not been able to get away with passing for white. The physical, material appearance of the body, of race especially, but certainly also gender, looms large because of the ramifications for an individual’s quality of life depending on his or her categorisation.

An anonymously written review acknowledges the force and skill with which *Playing in the Light* was written: ‘Stylistically nuanced and psychologically astute, this tight, dense novel gives complex history a human face’ (*Kirkus Reviews*, May 15, 2006). The statement, however, reveals nothing of the intricate way Wicomb shows the constructedness of race especially as it manifests in the new South Africa. J U Jacobs (2008) addresses the complexity of the multiple racial crossings-over in the novel: Marion’s parents crossed over from being coloured Afrikaans-speakers to being white English-speakers and Marion ‘now has to cross over from thinking of herself as white to conceptualising herself instead as coloured’ (11). Jacobs describes the process whereby South African coloureds who could pass for white denied the ‘rich complexity of their own identity ... immersing themselves in ... perceived hegemonic purity ... [and this] meant to be forever steeped in silence’ (11). In every aspect of their lives, they had to rebuild what they had stripped away. The construction of whiteness takes place layer by layer. As Marion thinks about how and what her mother had done, she finds it unnatural, even Frankensteinian. With her mother deceased and her father suffering from dementia, Marion confronts her own repositioning alone and the process is necessarily ongoing, never finished. Jacobs, drawing on Edouard Glissant,

writes about how ‘through processes of creolisation and *bricolage*, incoherent and discontinuous cultural identities have been formed out of various cultural fragments’. I would agree with the aptness of Jacobs’s observation and add that the protagonist’s task is to acknowledge the new, rhizomatic route her life has taken and will take. She must become nomadic. In identity formation there is no singular, linear trajectory.

In her 2010 *Journal of Southern African Studies* article Dorothy Driver interrogates how *Playing in the Light* introduces ‘a deceptively simple doubleness—or even duplicity—into its aesthetic form, expressing through its textualism, as well as its realism, the fictions at the heart of race classification and the performance of race’ (533). The doubleness extends to the way in which Marion takes steps towards achieving self-recognition and the way that her young coloured office assistant, Brenda, crosses over to take her place. Towards the end of the novel, Marion perceives that Brenda is appropriating her father, John Campbell’s story, and, therefore, her own story, by announcing that she is going to write it. The unanswerable questions Wicomb poses include how to untangle whose story is whose, who may tell it, and how. In literature, there is no definitive test for authenticity; narrative reliability, whether in texts or histories or both must be called into question. This is the crux of Driver’s perspicacious argument.

Wicomb’s most recent book, *The One That Got Away* (Umuzi, Cape Town and The New Press, New York, 2008) continues in the vein of disturbing the constructed identities of individuals and nations, and, in various ways, unsettling illusions of coherence. The book consists of twelve stories, five of which were previously published. Much of the scholarship generated by

this collection emerged from a conference called ‘Zoë Wicomb, the Cape & Cosmpolitan’.³⁵ The meaning of cosmopolitanism is not definite. Kai Easton and Andrew van der Vlies, writing an introduction to a *Safundi* issue dedicated to the conference, touch briefly on Kwame Anthony Appiah’s reminders that cosmopolitanism has its origins in fourth century BCE Greece and its contradictions are intentional. ‘The formulation was meant to be paradoxical, and reflected the general Cynic skepticism toward custom and tradition ... to take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives’, in other words to respect difference. This philosophy is not interested in any kind of forcible universalising or evangelising, rather, its focus is on reclaiming difference and recognizing mutuality. It is not a form of relativism either, instead it encourages discussions about moral responsibility and the difference between right and wrong. Cosmopolitanism is built into Wicomb’s project because she consistently invites disruptions to hegemonies and in writing about South Africa has on her radar, so to speak, the ethical issue of representing multiple communities. A transnational sensibility in this era of globalisation magnifies the cosmopolitan aspect of Wicomb’s latest collection of short stories. The stories are infused with the author’s exilic, nomadic consciousness thus place and displacement are crucial to the collection.

The special *Safundi* issue (2011) includes Abdulrazak Gurnah’s article ‘The Urge to Nowhere: Wicomb and Cosmopolitanism’, which the author describes in the abstract as detecting ‘a productive tension in Wicomb’s writing between the value of travel and the value of rootedness in one place, and proposes its resolution in the privileging of ambivalent moments of

³⁵ The conference took place in Stellenbosch in April 2010.

experience'. Using this lens, Gurnah reads two short stories from the 2008 collection, 'The One that Got Away' and 'There's the Bird that Never Flew' which have the main characters, Jane and Drew, in common. While I find his references to 'productive tension' and the 'privileging of ambivalent moments of experience' both useful and interesting, I take issue with Gurnah's desire to achieve any sort of resolution. Wicomb's stories are as impactful as they are because they defy resolution.

Some of the stories in *The One That Got Away* have recurring characters, but the last four do not. In 'The Struggle over the Sign' (2010) Dorothy Driver elaborates, 'The links between stories, the use of different perspectives from different speech communities, and the dramatisation of the historical and ideological entanglements of its two represented nations—South Africa and Scotland—mean that this book generally interrogates and exceeds the notion of nation more than the earlier ones do' (536). To return to the special issue of *Safundi*, it is interesting to examine Julika Griem's notion of how she sees Wicomb's view of cosmopolitanism. Her article, "'The trick lies in the repetitions': The Politics of Genre in Zoe Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*" examines genre in a postcolonial and cosmopolitan context. She argues that the form of interrelated stories allows Wicomb to link the aesthetic and political dimensions of her writing. (This is a strategy she deploys in her first book, also.) Griem cautions, however, against seeing this linkage as creating what Dorothy Driver refers to in 'The Struggle Over the Sign' as the 'conversational community' which makes the book seem amenable to Appiah's interpretation of cosmopolitanism. Rather, Griem writes, 'Wicomb's more skeptical stance in *The One That Got Away* seems to offer an implicit

critique of the normative and often idealistic implications of current conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism' (401). I imagine that an oversimplification of cosmopolitanism in popular culture might encourage misplaced idealism, but a study of the strategy of cosmopolitanism would reveal the extent to which it cannot be utopian. On the global level, it would take forming a world-state out of separate nation-states and on the individual level, it would require assuming a moral cosmopolitanism.³⁶ Wicomb does not underestimate her readers. While she does adopt a sceptical stance, and this is part of her overall ironic style, she is not trying to set her audience straight regarding cosmopolitanism.

Mariangela Palladino and John Miller co-authored an article which appears in the same issue of *Safundi*, 'Glasgow's Doulton Fountain and Postcolonial Heterotopia in "There's the Bird That Never Flew"'. The authors argue that 'Wicomb articulates the dialectic between *here* and *there* ... [she] fosters a dialogue between South Africa and Glasgow' (415). They contend that Wicomb's postcolonial revision of the Doulton Fountain imbricates the Victorian monument in an interweaving of connections of space, body, text and time that destabilise the totalizing ambitions of the Empire.³⁷

In my 2011 conference paper on this story, I argue that while the nomadic subject is embodied and situated, what we refer to as her identity is a non-unitary subjectivity. The ongoing transformation or becoming of the subject takes rhizomatic turns that are determined by multiple physical and existential factors. Identity is, to

³⁶ The theory of a world-state and a discussion of moral cosmopolitanism appear in Kleingeld, Pauline and Brown, Eric, 'Cosmopolitanism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/cosmopolitanism/> [Accessed 3 August 2012].

varying degrees, shaped by place as well as by the effects of circumstances on the embodied consciousness. The variables that constitute the protagonist, Jane, provide myriad opportunities for the interrogation of the influence of border crossing and displacement on identity formation. The story is set in Glasgow, Scotland, with flashbacks to Jane's 'home'—a word fraught with contradictory significance—in Cape Town, South Africa. The fact that newlywed Jane and her husband Drew are South Africans of mixed race complicates the issues of postcoloniality and the portrayal of colonial empire in the metropolis. The Doulton Fountain on the Glasgow Green, a massive Victorian monument to British colonialism, provides the focal point in this short story for the narrator's speculation about the unpredictable development of multiple subjectivities in response to dislocation, to being or feeling out of place. I contend that in addition to the complex discourse of colouredness, Jane's characterization as a woman and a colonised person, affects her self-perception and, therefore, her voice which is conscious of its own liminality. In this reading of Wicomb, I disturb more conventional understandings of postcoloniality by examining in the context of transnationalism the discursive and corporeal, racial and gendered body and notions of identity formation in flux.

To conclude this portion on Wicomb's critical reception, it is exciting to note that she has just won a prestigious new global writer's award. It was announced at Yale on 4 March 2013 that she is one of the nine recipients of the inaugural Windham Campbell Prize which offers worldwide acclaim and a significant monetary prize to each author.

³⁷ In November 2011, I presented a paper at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference in Atlanta entitled, 'Shaped by Place: Identity and Transnationalism in Zoe Wicomb's "There's the Bird that Never Flew"'.

Dorothy Allison: Critical Approaches

Regarding identity formation in flux, as I move now from Zoë Wicomb to an examination of the publication and reception of work by Dorothy Allison, many similar issues can be teased out including questions about the corporeal, racial and gendered body as well as the effects of poverty and violence on the subject. Dorothy Allison is best known for her novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992) which was made into a film directed by Anjelica Huston (1996). Many of her biographical details are already known to her readers because they form a significant part of Allison's work and as such bring up questions about the imaginary dividing line between the genres of fiction and autobiography. The introduction to the book *Critical Essays on the Works of American Author Dorothy Allison*, edited by Christine Blouch and Laurie Vickroy (2004) offers the following thumbnail sketch of the author's life before she made the commitment to writing:

Allison was born in Greenville, S.C., as the first child of a 15-year-old unwed mother who had dropped out of school to work as a waitress. Allison was primarily raised by her mother's family members in extreme poverty, and she has written extensively about the physical and sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather. (3).

She attended college in Florida on an academic scholarship and moved to New York in 1979 to pursue a Master's degree and began writing in earnest. Her first book length work in print was a collection of poems, *The Women Who Hate Me*, published by Long Haul Press in 1983. Her poems were hailed, mostly by the gay and lesbian community, as lyrical and accessible; reading them one can almost hear the musical lilt of Southern speech inflection influenced by southern Baptist church choirs. In an interview with Carolyn Megan (1994), the interviewer asks if all Allison's work begins as poetry.

DA: It's what I do. Almost everything I write begins in some lyric form. It's how I began; it's how I learned; it's what I do. Almost never does it continue as a poem anymore because I have become much more interested in narrative storytelling ... [my characters] have a way of storytelling that in some parallels gospel music. Like choruses that repeat ...(71)

Allison talks about the link between the two genres, 'I work a lot more with dialogue, which is the thing I moved into more and more from the poetry. In *The Women Who Hate Me* you can see where people talk. But moving into short stories, what I would do is to get first the dialogue, and with the novel that became central'. *Trash: Short Stories*, a collection of semi-autobiographical stories was first published in 1988 by Firebrand Books. The book won two Lambda Literary Awards for best lesbian small press book and best lesbian fiction. The book's title was inspired by a negative review of Mab Segrest's novel *My Mama's Dead Squirrel*, a work Allison says she loved. She was offended by the reviewer's use of the derogatory term 'white trash' and his attitude toward southerners³⁸. She spent the next two years writing *Trash*.

In the introduction to the 2002 edition, Allison asks and answers the question: 'Why write stories? To join the conversation' (xv). It is a rhizomatic, nomadic conversation she is referring to with twists, turns and offshoots. Topics of this conversation include race, specifically whiteness in the American south; gender; class, specifically poverty; sexuality, particularly lesbianism; violence; telling one's own truth; metacognitive writing about writing. In the book's one word title, three of these concepts/realities are presented: trash is shorthand for white trash which is a class-related insult referring to those living in poverty. In addition, the complete term itself depends upon blackness as referent, thus race is simultaneously addressed. Thirdly, the term has a regional origin and focus—the south. This book is clearly the progenitor

³⁸ This anecdote is told by Allison in her introduction to the 2002 edition of *Trash*, p. xiv

of all Allison's subsequent writing. She has incorporated all of the topics of conversation most important to her in these stories.

Current discussions by Allison scholars, according to Renny Christopher, seem to avoid or at least to gloss over the issue of class. Christopher argues that most published articles on Allison's work are analyses of sexual orientation and incest rather than poverty or the harsh realities of the working class struggle. She suggests the link between poverty and violence as the reason that interrogating class is a distasteful space for scholars to explore. She also mentions the reactions of her classmates in a postgraduate feminist studies discussion group comprising all but two members of the upper middle class themselves (Renny Christopher identifies as working class and bisexual) to reading Allison's story 'River of Names' from *Trash*. Apparently they were disturbed because 'it didn't show working-class people in a good light' (113). She comments on the unintentionally offensive approach taken by well-meaning people of the mainstream when they seek to have those on the margins shown as heroic, having them triumph over adversity—in other words, the desire for marginalised writers to fictionalise their experience to the extent that it becomes untrue but palatable. Christopher offers this as yet another example of attempting to silence queer, working-class women whose goal is to tell their stories so that the wider world will know their reality.

I am inclined to disagree with Christopher. While very few critical articles have poverty as their primary focus, all of the articles I have read do refer to Allison's family's struggle to provide food and shelter when she was a child, and the connection between poverty and frustration, humiliation, anger and violence. Most of these scholars look at poverty as part of a matrix of experience, rather than writing exclusively class-based critiques.

Another voice in the conversation about class is Kathlene McDonald's (1998).

She provides a history of the

southern poor-white character [who] has been a popular literary figure at least as far back as the eighteenth century. In 1728, William Byrd II headed an expedition of commissioners from Virginia and North Carolina to survey the disputed boundary line between the two colonies. Byrd, a wealthy Virginian, wrote about his encounters with the inhabitants of the North Carolina backwoods, or 'Lubbers,' as he referred to them, in *The History of the Dividing Line*. He characterized these 'Wretches' as lazy, dirty, vulgar. Ignorant, promiscuous, and deceitful, thereby setting a precedent for future fictional stereotypes. (16)

McDonald points out that like most judgments made from the outside, 'generally accepted stereotypes ignore the material conditions that make them true ... Exploring the role of poverty in shaping identity provides a means of examining these conditions from the inside' (18). McDonald's focus on class counters Christopher's assertion that scholars are not examining it in Allison's work. McDonald asserts that Allison does, in fact, incorporate 'many of the "true" elements of dominant stereotypes into her characters so that they simultaneously reinforce and resist standard images of white trash' (18). While Christopher disagrees with those who think that adopting the term white trash 'can reclaim and redeem it' (126), Allison herself says in the introduction to *Trash* that she gave her book that title 'to confront the term and claim it honorific' (xvi).

Allison allows no flat, narrow representations of types in her work and for this reason she pushes back against essentialised portrayals of binary lesbianism in literature, where a lesbian identifies as or is recognisable as either butch or femme and would always choose or desire the opposite in a sexual partner. In 'A Lesbian Appetite', a story in *Trash*, Christina Jarvis contends that she 'provides a useful intervention within recent queer theory, offering sexual identities that are performative

as well as attentive to the specificities of race, class, ethnicity, and the body ‘ (2000: 764). Hunger for certain kinds of food and desire for particular sexual fulfilment are deliberately conflated in this story to show that peoples’ tastes vary and that one should not essentialize or universalize lesbian appetites. Jarvis argues that the way Allison tells this story illustrates the performative nature of gender ‘while still attending to the specificity of material bodies’ (763). Allison draws her characters as identities and subjectivities in flux across a spectrum, real but not fixed.

It was this talent that made Carole deSanti, a young editor at Dutton, New York, offer Allison an advance on *Bastard out of Carolina* in August 1989, based on about thirty pages, before the novel was actually written. If timing is sheer luck, then Allison was lucky that deSanti and her superiors were ready to take a chance on a marginal writer because the publishing climate was, for that moment, favourable for a devastating novel by a poor, working-class lesbian feminist. While *Trash* had been published by a small literary press, Dutton was a large, mainstream company. Allison’s novel was published in the spring of 1992 and after receiving widespread mainstream critical acclaim (from *Booklist*, *Publisher’s Weekly*, *Washington Post Book World*, the *New York Times Book Review*, among others), was nominated in the autumn for the National Book Award.

Critical responses to Allison’s work present an array of concerns. It is difficult to tease out just one or two areas of concentration from writing that displays so many interwoven, intersecting themes. Examining one aspect of her work means neglecting another. Some critics examine genre, especially Allison’s strong autobiographical impulse embedded in her stories and novels. There is some discourse about whether *Bastard Out of Carolina* can be read as a postmodernist feminist work. Other critics narrow the discussion down to gender and sexuality. Yet others look at the trauma of

child sexual abuse. All of them at least touch on class. In her 2004 article 'The Burden of Surviving: The Ambiguous Body in Dorothy Allison's Fiction', Sherryl Vint embraces the materiality of the body as the site of the author's intersecting themes. Vint argues that the body functions as both the site of oppression and the ground of resistance. Vint writes that 'the body is made by cultural forces and other people's judgments, but it can be remade' (130). The topic of survival and the body invites ambiguity because of the vulnerability and strength represented by the body. The body can experience pain and pleasure as well as inflict pain or give pleasure; in some cases, a character conflates the two as sado-masochism. Further, in the post-traumatic phase, the survivor wants to make her survival meaningful. Allison does this by writing. In both of her novels, a character appears to choose her own survival over her children's. Vint argues that the body is an appropriate 'object' for expressing ambiguous feelings, that the body is both self and not self, and that it is always 'both social and public as well as biological and private' (143). I agree with Vint's argument to a point, but not when she asserts that Allison's characters 'are engaged in a struggle to find their true selves' (146). I disagree with the notion that there is a singular, finite, knowable subject that is continuous with a true self. Certainly there are some core aspects that anchor identity and subjectivity, but so much else is contingent and in flux. If, as Vint asserts, that the body is made by cultural forces, but can be remade, then she contradicts herself by positing a kind of essentialism that is one possible response to realism in fiction. At best, this encourages one to think about authorship and identity differently.

In Alan King's 'Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of a Postmodernist Feminism in Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*', a particularly useful term employed is midfiction. King refers to Alan Wilde who coined 'midfiction' to provide a bridge between

realism and postmodernism, which is an apt label for what Allison writes. Midfiction, says Wilde, ‘rejects equally the oppositional extremes of realism on the one hand and a world-denying reflexivity on the other, and ... invites us instead to perceive the moral, as well as the epistemological, perplexities of inhabiting and coming to terms with a world that is itself ontologically contingent and problematic’. Vincent King uses the incident in the novel where the hospital clerk ‘got mad’ at Bone’s Granny and Aunt giving different names for Bone’s father, and stamped ‘ILLEGITIMATE’ on her birth certificate to show an example of the instability of identity. Counter to Vint’s concept of finding one’s true identity, King argues that ‘Bone’s identity is not locked within her waiting to be discovered. Instead, it is created, fluid, and plural ... [i]n a postmodern world view, identity is actually more significant because it is generated and accepted by the subject rather than simply given to or imposed on him or her’ (2000: 126).

In terms of the overall structure of the novel, King argues that the absence of Daddy Glen, Bone’s stepfather, from chapters nine to sixteen, after so much focus on his abuse of Bone until that point is not a plot flaw but a deliberate strategy that ‘prevents the novel from exploiting the subject of incest or Bone herself. By temporarily halting the story of Bone’s abuse at the end of chapter eight, Allison refocuses the novel’. In the intervening chapters, ‘Bone must rewrite—and in some cases simply reject—the names and stories that make her vulnerable to violence. She instinctively understands that her identity, far from being stable or fixed, is transactional—the result of the ongoing conflict between the names and stories thrust upon her by others and those she creates for herself’ (124). From chapter seventeen until the end of chapter twenty two, the end of the book, Allison returns to the narrative of Bone’s abuse including a detailed, realistic accounting of her rape. Critics

like Katie Roiphe (1995) suggest that Allison is sensationalizing a story of incest as a plot device often deployed by southern writers. King, however, argues that ironically, the purposeful gap in the middle of the novel prevents it from exploiting incest and that by Bone rewriting identities that violate her, she is responding to what Paul Maltby calls ‘the fictionality of meaning’. In my view, the optimal lens through which to read this novel is midfiction, neither wholly postmodern nor entirely realist.

Another critical article that goes some way down the midfiction path is one by Moira Baker (2000) that examines the mystification of poverty which occurs in dominant discourses of social class by erasing the historical and economic conditions that produce it in advanced capitalism. Baker explains that these discourses perpetuate the myth that anyone willing to work hard enough can rise out of poverty and if they do not, it is due to inherent laziness or moral deficiency, which relegates them to the status of trash. She argues, using a postcolonial framework, that Allison subverts the manicheism delirium (after Fanon) that the dominant white, middle class, heteropatriarchy imposes on all others who represent an incomprehensible alterity, including those on the fringes of class, gender and sexuality. This, she asserts, Allison does by portraying her poor, female, lesbian characters as ‘human, flawed, and extraordinary’ (Baker: 29).

An important article by J. Brooks Bouson (2001) explores the shaping power of ‘familial and cultural shame ... in the construction of ... (Allison’s) white trash identity and shows how by internalising feelings of shame, her anger and desire for revenge are expressed verbally and behaviourally as “shame-rage”’(112). What is notable about shame theory in the context of analysing this novel is the way in which it weaves together the various strands of plot and theme, including the myths surrounding poor whites in the south and the abuse-victim’s guilt feelings. Addressing

shame and connecting it with religion, is Tania Friedel's 'The Transformational Power of Shame: Masturbation, Religion, and White Trash in *Bastard Out of Carolina*'. In this 2004 piece, Friedel grants Bone a transformative and empowering agency. She argues convincingly that Bone takes her fantasies as an opportunity to reclaim shame through performance and turn it, by scripting a new narrative, into resistance.

Helplessness becomes mastery in Bone's imagination. In addition, Friedel suggests that the gospel music of the revivalist church offers her an escape where the reality of darkness and the possibility of light can coexist. Thus regarding the either/or options presented by religion, salvation or damnation, salvation here is not foreclosed upon by shame³⁹. In her fantasies, Bone screams at Daddy Glen that she will have her retribution, '[l]ike in the Bible, like the way it ought to be ... ' (285) while in reality, she suffers silently.

Allison's next publications, *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature* (Firebrand, 1994), a small book of essays, and *Two or Three Things I know for Sure* (Dutton, 1998), are classified as autobiography. While most critical articles about *Skin* refer to or closely analyse the essay 'A Question of Class', I will introduce the book with a quote from 'Believing in Literature', since it spells out the way in which nomadism (not a term used by Allison, but one I think she would embrace) works to change thinking and promote social justice. For me, precipitating positive change--expanding human rights and environmentally responsible behaviour--is the ultimate, practical goal of literature and critical theory. Allison says that she believes literature should 'simply ... push people into changing their ideas about the world, and to go further, ... encourage us in the work of changing the world, to making it more just and more truly human' (1994: 165). This concept is inclusive in that it applies to every

³⁹ Tania Friedel's essay is included in *Critical Essays on the Works of American Author Dorothy Allison*, Blouch and Vickroy (eds.)

interpellation of the marginalised subject: female, black, poor, queer, victim, and invites her to stand up and speak out or write back to the oppressive forces.

In her 2002 article ‘F(r)ictions: Women Writing in Working Class Contexts’, Priti Kohli comments on *Skin*’s push for questioning and challenging the presumptions underlying dominant narratives about power, gender and class. She argues that Allison’s critical writing in this collection brings out ways ‘to think through complicated and multiple subject positioning in literature’, and, therefore, in life. This statement supports views of Allison as an agile and brave writer whose work is simultaneously postmodern feminist as well as realist. Essays in *Skin* cover a range of topics including those that address that for her

... the bottom line has simply become the need to resist that omnipresent fear, that urge to hide and disappear, to disguise my life, my desires, and the truth about how little any of us understand – even as we try to make the world a more just and human place. Most of all, I have tried to understand the politics of *they*, why human beings fear and stigmatize the different while secretly dreading that they might be one of the different themselves. (‘A Question of Class’: 35).

In *Skin*, she openly, compellingly discusses writing, politics, pornography, class, society and her own life, appetites and experience. In a review of the book Lisa A. Kirby writes that Allison recognizes that she does not fit into the literary constructs devised by those in power. ‘Thus, as in her own life, she also seeks to re-negotiate boundaries and categories in her writing. As she questions, “if Literature was a dishonest system by which the work of mediocre men and women could be praised by how it fit into a belief system that devalued women, queers, people of color, and the poor, then how could I try to become part of it?” (*Skin*: 169)’. This transgressive, nomadic standpoint with its inherent belief that words can change minds informs the essays in the collection.

Allison's book, *Two or Three Things I know for Sure* (1995) is labelled on its back cover as a memoir. The text, however, was originally a performance piece and was made into a documentary film by Tina DeFeliciano and Jane Wagner, shown on Public Television in 1998. The book contains old black and white family photographs and the ekphrastic captions are sometimes inaccurate and unreliable, as if to capture what Allison has said about her mother's and aunts' changing versions of stories from the past. Life writing calls into question ideas of truth and lies, fiction and non-fiction. Timothy Dow Adams points out that up to and including this book, 'Given that [Allison] has spent so much of her literary energy on this basic narrative (referring to a quote from 'A Question of Class'), which includes in all of its manifestations not only the story of her illegitimate birth and her early years in poverty, but also the additional story of physical beatings and incest by her stepfather, what considerations might lie behind her decision to narrate the story in both fictional and non-fictional forms?' (2004:83).

The ambiguity of genre choice in *Two or Three Things* is announced by the author in her first sentence and then used throughout the book as a refrain: 'Let me tell you a story' writes Allison. She captures speech rhythms in that direct address, thus invoking an ancient oral tradition which is an entirely different spoken genre from written memoir or fiction. To 'tell' is to speak a story, but telling also has to do with counting, recounting and telling on someone. However the term demanding interrogation here is 'story' rather than 'tell'. Especially for children, telling a story implies making things up or lying. Unless the child specifies that this is a 'true' story, the understanding is that it will be false or fictional. Adult readers and writers allow for more flexibility regarding truth, lies, and storytelling, so memoir opens up a space

where self-representation straddles fiction and non-fiction. Choosing to write, to tell her stories at all regardless of genre, is, for Allison, as strategy for survival.

Her second novel, *Cavedweller* (Dutton, 1998), has survival as one of its major themes. In *Cavedweller* as in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the mother chooses her own survival over her children's. Sherryl Vint's (2004) explication has it that in Allison's first novel, 'Bone, in choosing her own survival, must sacrifice her relationship with her mother in order to escape Glen' (134). My analysis of the situation, however, is that Anney, Bone's mother, actually abandons her daughter in order to stay with Glen because she believes she cannot survive, psychologically speaking, without her husband who provides her a measure of legitimacy. She does not protect her child from Glen's abuse or fulfil her normative, archetypal maternal responsibilities to Bone. The child is not in a position to exercise choice in this situation. In the later novel, *Delia*, the mother-protagonist in *Cavedweller*, chooses physical survival by running away from her abusive husband, Clint, and leaving her two babies, Amanda and Dede, with him, in order to avoid being beaten to death. Eleven years after having left Cayro, Georgia for Los Angeles with another man, Delia returns with her youngest daughter, Cissy. Here I do agree with Vint's assessment of Delia's tragic predicament:

Delia believes, and Clint later confirms, that his escalating physical abuse would have turned into murder had she remained ... Having chosen her own survival over staying with her daughters, Delia confronts the seemingly impossible task of trying to rebuild a relationship with them in the face of their understandable resentment and feelings of abandonment. (132)

Vint makes it clear that these characters' choices are far from simple; they involve complex ambiguities that are ultimately unsatisfactory to all concerned in the moment, but that with the passage of time, the choice to live has to be the right one, the justifiable one. In telling the stories of impossible choices, Allison seeks to manipulate

her readers into questioning their own prejudices and destabilising long-held attitudes that tend to oversimplify peoples' strengths and weaknesses as a way to praise or condemn their actions. Her approach to broadening understanding and acceptance is one that would resonate with theorist Rosi Braidotti. Transforming attitudes calls for a nomadic mindset. Just as identity politics should be called into question for emphasizing one aspect of an individual at the expense of another, real choices in the lived experience ought to be opened up for examination of all facets affecting the outcome.

In a similar vein, in her 2002 critical article on *Cavedweller*, Karen Gaffney utilises the strategy of intersectionality⁴⁰ to reveal how categories of race, class, sexuality and gender 'intersect in the construction of white trash' (43). Gaffney's analysis of Allison's construction and 'excavation' of Cissy in *Cavedweller* provides the perfect opportunity to deploy intersectionality in characterisation. First, it must be pointed out that Gaffney takes the quote in her essay's title from Allison's book *Skin* in which Allison explains that in order to understand how the tool of othering works, '[c]lass, race, sexuality, gender—and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other—need to be excavated from the inside' (*Skin* 35). Gaffney's intersectional analysis shows how multiple categories 'influence and intersect with each other (so) that we can begin to excavate the myth of white trash'(49). While the starting point of the excavation is the dismantling of two categories, race and class (white and trash), eventually Cissy's self-awareness expands to include an improved relationship with her mother, Delia, deeper and more compassionate insights into

⁴⁰ Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality emphasizes multiple and intersecting categories of difference as manifesting simultaneously in individuals. Intersectionality resists the divisions that separate categories like race and gender as mutually exclusive or hierarchical. Crenshaw writes that intersectionality 'can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color' in 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color'.

Delia's dying ex-husband Clint's humanity (despite the abuse she has heard about but never witnessed), and, eventually, her own lesbianism. As Gaffney puts it after setting up the analysis by referring to Cissy's childhood eye injury, 'Cissy's unique visual perspective becomes a metaphor throughout the novel for her ability to see beyond the dominant cultural stereotypes of white trash' (52). Oddly, after her initial fear of the dark in the caves, Cissy, now a teenager, becomes so comfortable underground that she considers herself a 'cave dweller' (*Cavedweller* 307). As she grows more comfortable with herself, according to Gaffney, her desire is 'to excavate the categories of difference that intersect in her identity' (52).

Framing a Theoretical Approach

The theoretical underpinnings of this thesis are feminist, which implies that which leads to some sort of political action against oppressive patriarchy. As a female feminist, I see identity as a process that must acknowledge biology as well as the understanding that identity is also culturally constructed; it need not be all one thing or all the other. Thus sex at birth, whether determined by chromosomes or by externally observable physical features is crucial to the individual's identity formation and in almost all cases fit one or the other of a binary structure⁴¹. From then on, the person placed into one of two categories (unless the classification is intersex, and even then, most often the parents or the medical establishment might push for the child to be treated—in the behavioural and medical senses--as a boy or a girl) is usually expected to respond to socially determined norms for that category. This is how one becomes a girl or a boy formed by performance and language. Jonathan Culler sums up Judith

⁴¹ In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler writes, 'It would be wrong to think that the discussion of "identity" ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that "persons" only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility' (17).

Butler's performative theory of gender and sexuality saying, '...the utterance "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" by which a baby is, traditionally, welcomed into the world, is less a constative utterance (true or false, according to the situation) than the first in a long series of performatives that create the subject whose arrival they announce' (Culler 2000: 103). People appear to need to instantly categorise any person as either this or that. The gap, when there is one, between the hegemony of binary gender expectations and the individual's performance is a space where resistance is possible.

Before considering other factors in identity formation, I will turn briefly to situating woman/women and align myself with those who see feminist literary theory as unified by its political nature though fractured by other critical divisions. Ellen Rooney writes about the tear in the obviousness of feminine subjectivity. 'In the process, what was once "common sense"—that we are women—emerges as a site for interrogation and political work. Simone de Beauvoir describes this movement in terms of the rejection of the naturalization of the category of woman: "One is not born, but rather becomes as woman". In the process of exposing the ideological work involved in becoming woman/women, theory and practice are intimately entwined *within* the domain of political action itself.' (Rooney 2006: 74)

Race is also crucial to identity since bodily appearance affects how one is perceived by others which is, in turn, a factor in forming self-identity. Identity is formed by a sense of the self in the context of social interaction; it is a process whereby one becomes aware of how one sees and is seen. It is impossible to say which is registered first on seeing a person one has not seen before, gender or race, and in terms of white normativity, the race of the perceiver is as relevant as that of the one being perceived. In other words, in the South African context where people of mixed race were categorised as coloured, Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb were labelled

as what they were not: black or white. Under apartheid, the first question of categorisation was about racial purity: are you black or white? If one was neither visually 100% one or the other, then the default classification would have been coloured. In the American South, Carson McCullers and Dorothy Allison's whiteness is as evident to the observer as their femaleness, but what may not have been instantly known just by looking is their sexuality. Beyond biology, a range of identity categories including gender and race are constructed by language and culture. Both biology and constructivism pertain. To answer those who polarise academic theory/discursivity and the 'real'/material world, I would say that the real world consists of both and is everywhere. Because of feminism's political project, these ought not to be seen as opposing sides of a battle. Certainly wholesale essentialising is unacceptable, but a tempered measure of essentialism is sometimes necessary, first to illustrate the workings of constructivism as its contrast, and second to mobilise groups.

Gayatri Spivak put it well when she referred to her 'strategic essentialism' in a now notorious 1987 interview. She was justifying the expediency of temporary solidarity and identification with a group for the purpose of social action, not as an excuse to advocate for essentialism. In order to act to improve their lot, a particular group of people must be willing to set aside the potentially divisive minutiae of identity politics and agree to come together as the gendered race and/or class or category that demands to be heard. In *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) Spivak explains that '[a] strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory' (4). This is an instance of conceptual border crossing, an act of ideological nomadism, that strengthens rather than undermines the feminist agenda. Subversion and collaboration

can be catalysts for change, but discourse and theorising must precede action, and action is strategic.

Spivak created her unique postcolonial feminist critical theory by building on and rerouting the foundational postcolonialism of Edward Said and Franz Fanon, in whose work the subject is always male. She utilises those aspects of Marxism and Deconstruction that suit her purpose which include drawing attention to the ways in which capitalism is inhospitable to women and the proletariat, and the unsettling of Eurocentric hegemonic binaries and hierarchies which pit against each other men/women; white/black; mind/body, and more. Much of this deconstructive theoretical approach meshes well with my project. New ways of seeing emerge from the disruption of old vertical hierarchies and either/or binaries. I will show how productive confusion can yield innovation when one is brave enough to cross borders. To return to Spivak here, she develops her theoretical perspective which emphasizes the intersection of gender and ethnicity, especially as it affects the silenced 'Third World' subaltern woman.⁴² That said, however, she cautions against assumptions by western feminists that there is a homogenous, monolithic postcolonial 'Third World' woman, a warning issued by Chandra Mohanty ('Under Western Eyes', 1986) as well. Mohanty points out that well-meaning western feminists are as guilty of colonising these women from the global south and from the east whose circumstances are quite different by objectifying them as a group like male colonisers have done. One suggestion is that we can help people remain sensitive to the differences and complexities of the lived experience of women everywhere by viewing all women as colonised by men. 'Many feminist critics have pointed out the similarity between the marginalisation and silencing, the objectification and patriarchal oppression afforded

⁴² Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson and M. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988: 253)

to both women and subordinated peoples under colonialism, seeing men as colonisers, women as colonised' (Wisker 2000: 23). Wisker acknowledges that this analogy is a short cut, and later cautions that we should take a more nuanced view of coloniser and colonised, but she adds that it 'ironically helps many of us to bridge gaps in our understanding and experience when confronting and trying to understand racial discriminatory practices' (23). We should not, however, assume that if a binary power structure is reversed, some kind of justice will have been done. Switching from dominated to dominating is far from being a just course and emerging hybridities make it difficult to locate the coloniser definitively, let alone to reverse hierarchies of power.

Nomadism and resistance to oppressive forms of transnationalism (see Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih and their concept of minor-to-minor support networks within transnationalism) are paths to social justice that take into account individuality as well as solidarity and make space for the problematising of belonging and exile. Feminist nomadism and minor transnationalism, both seek to transgress hegemonic boundaries and establish lateral networks. Here is the core of my theoretical approach. I first encountered the concept of postmodern feminist nomadism in the work of Rosi Braidotti, who writes, 'Just like real nomads—who are an endangered species today, threatened with extinction—nomadic thinking is a minority position' (1994:29). Braidotti builds upon and then diverges from the radical nomadic epistemological groundwork laid by Deleuze and Guattari. She embraces aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic modes of thinking, emphasizing lateral links rather than the vertical arborescent model (with its traditional, western, Cartesian outlook) and its top-down power relations (*A Thousand Plateaus*: 1987), but she breaks with them on the issue of female subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari make no

claim about real women; their notion of becoming-woman is not biologically defined.⁴³ Their concept of becoming has to do with molecularity and the permeability of inside and outside, of a continuity between subject and object that is reminiscent of some tenets of Zen. Although these philosophers disavow unity because of its implications for tyranny, their thinking does allow for an idea of universal molecular oneness. As a feminist who acknowledges the materiality of the body as well as the constructedness of socioculturally imposed gender and racial identities, I align myself with Braidotti who writes ‘[t]he sexualization and the embodiment of the subject are the key notions in what I would call “feminist nomadic epistemology”’ (1994:174). I read the fiction of the authors in this study through Braidotti’s subversive lens, making use of her theory of nomadism:

...the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior. Not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that define the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling. (1994: 5)

While metaphoric nomadism is the main lens through which I present my ideas, literal and figurative transnationalism is another, and the two are clearly linked if only by the notion of comings and goings which lead to shifting attitudes. In *Scattered Hegemonies* (1994) editors Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan refer to global cultural and economic exchange and flow. They write about the power structures engendered by those relationships, in particular about how women everywhere are affected by globalisation. Grewal and Kaplan require that the reader examine ‘[t]ransnational linkages [that] influence every level of social

⁴³ Diane J. Beddoes discusses Rosi Braidotti’s response to *A Thousand Plateaus* in ‘Breeding Demons: A critical enquiry into the relationship between Kant and Deleuze with specific reference to women’ in Chapter 6 section IV.

existence' (1994:13). The 'trans' in transnationalism has to do with the material and conceptual border crossings back and forth between the people and the political and economic structures of various nation states. This travel back and forth suggests material passageways and thresholds across and between national boundaries.

I contend that an aspect of minor transnationalism is also about the interior geography of the individual and the ways in which she negotiates the doorways and corridors of her own liminal subjectivities. Transnational feminism points to the need to transgress and traverse the hegemonic borders of Eurocentrism and all forms of colonisation including racism, sexism, exploitative labour practices and the denigration of cultural practices that do not mirror one's own. Further, since, as Braidotti puts it 'nomadic thinking is a minority position', both nomadism and the theory of a minor transnationalism posited by Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (2005) weave together to form the critical stance that I take throughout this thesis. In the introduction to their 2005 book, the editors Lionnet and Shih relate an anecdote about how the seed of their minor transnational theory emerged from a chance encounter at an international conference in Paris in 1998. Despite their work in different major academic disciplines—Lionnet in the discipline of French (francophone, African and African-American Studies) and Shih in the discipline of Chinese (sinophone and Asian-American Studies)--they found common ground in their interest in ethnic studies as well as in the minor relationship of ethnic studies to the each of their disciplines. They also realized that their work as scholars in two different disciplines would usually not provide them with the opportunity to meet. But for this chance encounter which provided them with an important outside perspective, they normally would be too caught up in the construct of relating to their

discipline vertically, with the greatest power and authority emanating from people, groups and structures at the top. This limitation was not just a consequence of university systems. It was also a result of the way they saw themselves in relation to their disciplines. ‘. . . [O]ur battles are always framed vertically, and we forget to look sideways to lateral networks that are not readily apparent’ (2005: 1).

The result of framing relations vertically is a limited perspective that reifies binaries. The dominant (or major) is always the centre or pinnacle of such hierarchies. Habituated to the pattern of top-down exchanges, we fail to see the rich and manifold ways people can relate to each other, exchanging ideas and support. Looking sideways to lateral networks challenges this vertical paradigm. It reveals difference and complexity that is otherwise suppressed in/by a vertical construction. It removes the attention from the dominant, thereby undermining its position of power; the dominant perspective becomes just one perspective among many. And looking sideways, minority to minority, provides us with critical, outside perspectives that continue to promote change and hybridity. I shine the light of feminist nomadism and, to a lesser extent, minor transnationalism on the rest of this thesis beginning with self-representation, moving to issues of embodied belonging and concluding with the state of (the) exile.

Home and Away

For the most part, McCullers’, Head’s, Wicomb’s and Allison’s representations of their homelands/hometowns were written, while they were somewhere else. A kind of exile existed for these writers long before they physically moved away, however, and this is evident in their creation of restless characters which are not at home even while they are at home, and, more intimately, are not at ease in

their own bodies. They must leave in order to try and become fulfilled. Carson McCullers' debilitating illnesses and alcoholism made fulfilment elusive; in fact they exiled her all the more. For Bessie Head mental illness is an exilic journey, in addition to the actual journeys she undertook from Durban to Cape Town to Johannesburg and finally Botswana.

After leaving home, physical and temporal distance, nostalgia, and painful memories result in different ways of structuring the verbal product of lived experience. The writer in exile puts the chaos or arbitrariness of her experience in/of the homeland into an artificial, ordered frame when using that home as the setting for fiction or fictionalised autobiography. Exile here has to do with migrancy and dispossession, rather than any romantic notion of yearning for an idealised, lost world.

⁴⁴For the writers in this study, memory, identity and meaning-making drive the creative process.

All four authors struggle with various forms of exile and othering (socially constructed as not belonging), and this physical and psychic state is an important part of how and why I link them in this study. The awareness of the other – biracial and/or female and/or poor and/or queer—and the sociocultural legacy of being seen as other, subaltern, or on the margins, underscores my rationale for examining the American south as a region also still struggling with its brutal past. The consideration of gendered economics in apartheid South Africa and the post-slavery, twentieth century U.S. south is a necessary component of this study, as poverty affects all people, regardless of race, in devastating ways. Transnational feminist theory subsumes crucial issues of materiality and also reflects on questions about identity, multiplicity and power, and the possibility of the privileged standpoint of the outsider within.

Because Rosi Braidotti embraces a similar kind of intersubjectivity and transdisciplinarity, her vision of nomadism aligns well with transnational feminist theory as applied to the work and lives of the writers analysed in this thesis. The four authors, though poor when young, and racially or sexually marginalised, were/are certainly educated, and, therefore, not technically subaltern themselves. By reading widely and in their intellectual curiosity, they saw how writing provides a voice. They all wrote back to the forces that wanted them subjugated. The act of writing itself is the antidote to victimisation. With this in mind, I will illuminate issues of the relationship among power, resistance and the trinity of gender, race and class. Cultural constructions (effective and affective) and stereotyping begin with language and continue through the categorisation of people into types and groups, desirable and undesirable.

A point of connection between South Africa and the southern United States is that the pseudoscience of Eugenics was influential in both places especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Intelligence, social class, racial purity, mental hygiene—all these factors come into play when considering how people assign value to the lives of other people. Accordingly, blacks were viewed as inferior to whites, and certain categories of whites were seen to be lower on the ladder of human development. This connects with the disturbing idea held by some Americans in the first part of the twentieth century that poverty is the (genetic) fault of poor whites in the United States⁴⁵, especially the south—as if poor people are genetically predisposed to laziness,

⁴⁴ In her PhD dissertation, Karen Caplan writes ‘Reterritorialization through autobiography, memoir, and other genres rely on the radical distancing and estrangement of perspective to function as minor literature but refuse the terms of absolute exile’ (1987:4)

⁴⁵ Nicole Hahn Rafter writes that the Eugenics Record Office funded and published several studies, while popular science magazines and sociological journals published others. The authors consistently describe the “degenerate” traits of the families of poor rural white Americans and propose “solutions” to prevent them from continuing to reproduce.

ugliness, promiscuity and alcoholism⁴⁶. Consider Frantz Fanon's term 'manicheism delirium' (1967:183), used to refer to the racist colonialist notion (from their position of 'surplus morality') that whites were virtuous and good, while blacks were absolutely degenerate and not fully human. 'In the colonies, black people were figured among other things, as gender deviants, the embodiments of prehistoric promiscuity and excess, their evolutionary belatedness evidenced by their "feminine" lack of history, reason and proper domestic arrangements' (McClintock: 1995:44). This concept of racial hierarchies has been extended to dehumanizing apprehensions of poor whites as well. Anne McClintock offers an astute examination of the history of western notions of degeneracy used to justify white, male power in the colonies and the metropolis:

By the latter half of the 19th century, the analogy between race and gender degeneration came to serve a specifically modern form of social domination, as an intricate dialectic emerged—between the domestication of the colonies and the racializing of the metropolis. In the metropolis, the idea of racial deviance was evoked to police the "degenerate" classes—the militant working class, the Irish, Jews, feminists, gays and lesbians, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics and the insane—who were collectively figured as racial deviants, atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of the modern, imperial metropolis...After mid-century, I suggest, a triangulated analogy among racial, class, and gender degeneration emerged." (1995:43-4)

This mindset permitted vigilant white, male, heterosexual control of reproduction within church-sanctioned heterosexual marriage and male bourgeois control of capital in commodity markets. It certainly legitimized repressive actions taken in the name of imperialism or at least in aid of the strengthening of the nation state.

During the period between World Wars in South Africa and the southern states, extremes of masculinity and femininity were upheld as normative models. This attitude held that worthy citizens of the nation state were those who engaged in

⁴⁶ Dorothy Allison makes direct reference to this notion of genetic inferiority, '[w]e were the bad poor'

procreative heteronormativity, contributing to the supply of a new generation of patriots—as long as the father was also a provider. Carson McCullers creates numerous characters which straddle or completely cross over the gender and sexuality divide. In this, she is certainly nomadic in the sense used by Braidotti. Dorothy Allison grew up being told she was a bastard and white trash and, as she puts it, she ‘knew herself queer’; Head and Wicomb were categorized by apartheid as coloured and, therefore, racially inferior. The writers in this study wrote their resistance to these narrow, warped notions of worthiness and normativity.

Body in the World

The relationship between social conditions and the written expression of ideas is at the foundation of this thesis. Theory can be a catalyst for social action and change, and my use of Braidotti’s nomadism underscores this approach. As such, among the most fruitful approaches to theory are those that ask questions about the quality and value of a human life, and the ways in which writing engages with such ethical issues and is the means by which many of these debates take place. One of the theorists to foreground these issues is Judith Butler, who begins her book *Undoing Gender* with this challenge to our thinking, ‘What makes for a livable world is no idle question’ (2004: 17). In Chapter 2 I will establish the body as the starting point for action and interaction in life. Lived experience is perceived through the body which is the agent that ‘does’ as well as the vulnerable subject which experiences ‘being done to’, as Butler puts it. It is useful to keep in mind the notion of the individual as well as the nation state ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ as it affects the characters in all the fiction to be analysed.

Structure

The arc of this thesis begins with self-representation, moves into issues of the body and belonging and concludes with the interrogation of identity and state of (the) exile. Each of these three areas constitutes a chapter, thus my thesis is structured as three Chapters bookended by an Introduction and a Conclusion.

Chapter One, entitled ‘Southern Stories: Speaking Up, Writing Back and Self-Representation’ explores the roots in oral culture of McCullers’s, Head’s, Wicomb’s and Allison’s self-referential writing and interrogates the manipulative power of autobiographical narrative. My initial focus in the chapter is on storytelling that is first oral and then textual. Aurality and orality, listening to and telling stories, was an integral part of life in Southern Africa and the U.S. south when these writers were children. I move on to interrogate generic hybridity and the roles in autobiography of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, agency.

In this chapter, I examine some of Carson McCullers’s autobiographical essays from *The Mortgaged Heart* (2005) and *Illumination and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers* (1999). I go on to analyze self-representation in Bessie Head’s *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990), *The Cardinals: with Meditations and Short Stories* (1993), *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981) and the novel *A Question of Power* (1974). Following the analysis of writing by Head is a reading of self-representation in Zoe Wicomb’s short stories ‘A Clearing in the Bush’ and ‘A Trip to the Gifberge’ from her first story cycle, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). To conclude the chapter, I look at Dorothy Allison’s *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995) and *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992).

Chapter Two moves beyond the interrogation of the autobiographical ‘I’ (which asks who inhabits this skin and how does she tell her ‘truth’?) and examines critical and philosophical ideas around the physical body and the discursively constructed body in the work of my selected writers. The chapter title encapsulates the overarching focus of this section, ‘The Outsider Within: Body and Exilic Consciousness’. I will explore the interconnectedness and influence of material circumstances and psychic intangibles on the transnational body ‘at home’ and the body en route. Many the ramifications of nomadism are accommodated here.

Specific close readings are of grotesque bodies in Carson McCullers’s *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and *The Member of the Wedding* (1946); body and exile in Bessie Head’s *Maru* (1971), and madness and genius in Head’s *A Question of Power* (1974); sex and food in Dorothy Allison’s story ‘A Lesbian Appetite’ (2002) and embodiment in Zoë Wicomb’s short story ‘You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town’ (1987).

Chapter Three, entitled ‘The State of the Exile: Situated Subjectivity’, explores the state of the exile in terms of identity formation and links between place and identity. Here I propose a dynamic rather than static ontology based in becoming rather than being, following Rosi Braidotti’s adaptation of Deleuze’s nomadism. I argue that subjectivity is not coterminous with identity, but grows out of it. Identity refers to the self in the context of social interaction. Subjectivity provides the condition for selfhood. I use the lens of nomadism to analyse Wicomb’s story ‘Nothing Like the Wind’ and ‘There’s the Bird that Never Flew’ and (both 2008). In addition, I analyse aspects of Allison’s story ‘Gospel Song’ (2002) excerpted from *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and her second novel, *Cavedweller* (1999).

In the conclusion I demonstrate how Wicomb's short story 'In Search of Tommie' (2009) pulls together key thesis debates which have been woven throughout my work. I end having shown how this unique combination of writers from vastly different eras and places highlight the convergences and dissonances in their writing lives by focussing on exile as the common thread. Reading these writers through the lens of feminist nomadism disturbs ideas of place-centred identities and makes a new contribution to the body of work on these women writers from South Africa and the American South.

Chapter One

Southern Stories: Speaking Up, Writing Back and Self- Representation

‘What kind of beast would turn its life into words?

What atonement is this all about?

- and yet, writing words like these, I’m also living.’

Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems, 1974-1977*.

‘My life is history, politics, geography. It is religion and metaphysics. It is music and language.

Paula Gunn Allen, ‘The Autobiography of a Confluence’

Theoretical Framework

What Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson refer to as ‘self life writing’ (2010: 18) is always already complicated by the fact it is a version of a story both by and about the teller. Self life writing is historically and geographically situated, gendered, contingent, and it is fluid and dynamic. The representation is dependent upon memory, emotion and words. Writing is the most precise of art forms illuminating the interior life of the artist by attempting to pin down elusive aspects of identity, impressions of how one was *then* captured by words written *now*. The writer who writes her self and her life is by necessity a nomadic subject who in acknowledging the passage of time, looks at points on her life’s timeline with the consciousness that specific events are not fixed, frozen or unchangeable; they change with her as her perspective and interpretation change over the years. Such mutability precludes the possibility of absolute *truth* or *reality* because in the first place experience can never be directly represented, as Georges Gusdorf asserted in his notoriously Eurocentric essay ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’ (1956) and in the second, words are elusive signifiers, multivalent indicators of meaning. Contemporary theories of

autobiographical writing problematise any idea of a ‘truthful’ narrative; self life writing goes far beyond merely telling the story of what happened.

Carson McCullers, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb and Dorothy Allison write fiction as well as what has been called autobiography (sometimes they label some of their own work as such, sometimes it is referred to as autobiography by others but not by the writers themselves); they write hybrid genres that push the boundaries of fiction and other genres of non-fiction to include self life writing. The presence of self-representational elements in genres other than Autobiography (with a capital A) disrupts notions of impermeable genre categories. In this chapter, I will examine the intersection between autobiographical modes and journalism, short fiction, the novel and essays.

Until the last quarter of the twentieth century, there have been two schools of thought on women’s autobiography, each equally reductive. On the one hand, historically, autobiography has been seen as the story of his distinguished life written by a man for men, so women’s autobiography was not given much critical attention. Paradoxically, though, life writing has been portrayed as natural to a woman writer who uses her actual life and experiences as material for her books. Journals, diaries and memoirs were the accepted genre form for women’s writing because they were perceived as less important and not taken as serious forays into literary writing the way that men’s autobiography was.⁴⁷ Since the publication of *Auto/Biographical Discourses* in 1994, women’s life writing has burgeoned as a field of critical enquiry, but at the time of writing this volume, Laura Marcus had to map the course ahead: ‘The gender balance of autobiographical history cannot be corrected simply by adding

⁴⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.) refer to Georges Gusdorf (1956) in the introduction to their *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, as having configured autobiography as unquestionably white, male, and Western. (1998: 8) In the same introduction they comment on how Estelle C. Jelinek

more women to the list; basic suppositions about subjectivity and identity underlying autobiographical theories have to be shifted' (220). Just as the autobiographical writing of women and colonised people had to be recuperated as a legitimate field of study, so, too has storytelling or oral artistic production begun to be researched, analysed and theorised. There is a link between the oral tradition practised by women--as storytellers as well as story-listeners--and their development as writers of autobiography in its various forms.

There are important implications here for postcolonial feminist narrative in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Modernisation in southern Africa and the American South will have had a great influence on what and how McCullers, Head, Wicomb and Allison are writing; they are aware of the pace and extent of change occurring during their lifetimes. They all lived during and experienced a portion of the middle third of the twentieth century which was a period during which rapid technological advances accelerated the pace of social change in the communities from which they came. They each had a sense of how things used to be; their own awareness of the old ways quickly evolving is reflected in their work. The perception of time itself as well as the material changes wrought by the passage of time are evident in their writing. In addition, the issue of generationality--McCullers and Head from an earlier generation, Wicomb and Allison living and writing more recently--adds depth to an already multi-layered exploration of time as it affects their work. Cultural change is interesting here as it offers a temporal counterpart to discussions of spatial transition (place) around exile in the thesis. Lack of meaningful cultural change could lead to exilic nomadic consciousness.

(1980) essentialises and trivializes gendered experience by characterising women's life writing as emphasizing personal and domestic details and describing connections to other people. (10)

The accelerating pace of life lived during this ongoing era of rapid modernisation leads to a changing sense of the value of time from the earlier to the later period. As a result of globalisation, people all over the world today are often hyperconscious of not wanting to 'waste' time. And, of course, a discussion of time necessitates an examination of place, since this study acknowledges the importance of the historically and geographically situated subject, an analysis of the influences of both *when* and *where* in identity formation. Although they experience physical and psychic displacement or exile, through their work these writers open up a literary space which becomes a kind of home accommodating a variety of generic possibilities under the general heading: women's autobiography.

Rosi Braidotti weaves together the strands of time, place, experience and autobiography into her theory of nomadism and spells out how this works in her own writing:

I have grounded the depiction of the nomadic state in my own life experiences, embodying it and situating it in the most concrete possible manner. The auto-biographical tone that will emerge in the course of this ... is my way of making myself accountable for the nomadic performances that I enact in the text ... it is a retrospective map of places I have been ... I want to practice a set of narrations of my own embodied genealogy, that is to say I want to revisit certain locations and account for them. As Caren Kaplan puts it this kind of positionality is "a fictional terrain, a reterritorialization that has passed through several versions of deterritorialization to posit a powerful theory of location based on contingency, history and change."⁴⁸ The practice of "as if" is a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now. (1994: 6)

Braidotti's route of rescuing or recuperating what we need of the past to effect transformation in our lives in the present is a brilliant and unusual way of apprehending the view of women's autobiography through the lens of feminist

⁴⁸ Caren Kaplan. 'Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse', *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): p.198

nomadism. This is a strategy by which theory can change minds and bring about actual, material change.

Gender and genre are linked when the question is asked: What is women's autobiography? Leigh Gilmore writes that '[t]he question turns for an answer in two directions: to its generic base – "What is autobiography?" – and to a question posed in increasingly sophisticated ways by feminists: "What are women?"' (1994:17) There is not a direct route to follow in pursuit of possible answers to these questions, but a meandering river joined by various tributaries along the way. One of the streams that flows into women's self life writing in this study is the oral tradition that gives voice to the compulsion to tell one's own story. Another channel to examine is the question of the gendered subject, considering the female self writing autobiography in terms of her always-becoming identity and her relation to the other. If the norm is the white, heterosexual male, then she is the other, even more so as a woman writer of autobiography. In grappling with representativity we should ask if she is 'speaking *as* and speaking *for*'⁴⁹ mixed race women, lesbians, poor women or any group at all. Both identity politics and aesthetic judgment do play a role in determining narrative features in work that can be called self life writing.

Telling Their Own Stories

While storytelling may be an end in itself, McCullers, Head, Wicomb and Allison saw it as a bridge to autobiography. If I make this sound like a straightforward journey on a well-drawn map to a precise destination, I am doing my writers and the autobiographic endeavour an injustice. Self life writing is the most nomadic of all genres. The code of referentiality makes it seem that there is a single *I* narrated by that

⁴⁹ These potentially conflicting aspects of representativity appear in Miller, N. (1991). *Getting Personal*.

same *I* who is consistent and unified. Leigh Gilmore writes, '[I]nsofar as autobiography represents the real, it does so through metonymy, that is, through the claims of contiguity wherein the person who writes is the same as the self in the writing: one extends the other, puts her in another place' (1994 : 67). Place, time and language are at the heart of this study and are complicated by the interplay between intellectual knowledge and experiential knowledge—conveyed by words. But as with all language 'autobiography emerges as a special case in the definition of subjectivity because it interiorizes the specular play between the producer/producing and the produced' (Gilmore 1994:71).

If autobiography is a special case, how, then, do we differentiate between autobiography and fiction when they seem, as they sometimes do, intertwined? Paul de Man's response is that 'the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity ... it is undecidable' (1979: 921). It is with this undecidability in mind that I approach the work by my chosen writers; traces of orality emerge in their stories, and autobiography and fiction move fluidly to engulf one another.

Adding to the complexity of the autobiographical writing of McCullers, Head, Wicomb and Allison is their exile. If life-writing has to do with a symbolic and creative representation of the self, these displaced writers, by virtue of their departure from home and homeland, were presented the opportunity and the challenge of reinventing themselves in a new culture, of remembering their origins from a different vantage point both geographically and psychically. Their process is indeed nomadic feminism at work.

Since two of the writers in this study, Head and Wicomb, are African, it is important to heed here Chandra Mohanty's warning to resist the imperialistic attitude that much Western feminist discourse has taken towards a singular, homogenised so-

called Third World woman (2003: 36 – 37). Although Dorothy Allison is not from a Third World country, her economic circumstances, extreme poverty and a working class background, bring her into closer alignment with other marginalised women observed by the gaze of Western feminism. Her lesbianism places her on a peripheral or liminal plane as well. Carson McCullers may be the ‘odd woman out’ among the four writers in this study (in the face of Mohanty’s categories) in terms of her middle class background, although her level of critical and professional success was destabilised by the need to sell short pieces to magazines in order to make money quickly to pay her mounting medical bills. So while she may fit into a broadly conceived middle class rather than the working poor like the others, as a bisexual woman writer struggling with serious health challenges, McCullers can certainly also be characterised as on the fringes of the mainstream.

Other considerations in theorising women’s autobiography here include the apparently divergent political and critical/theoretical projects of feminism whose differences became more acute with post structuralism, but are now, in the twenty-first century, both being seen and portrayed as necessary components of activism; progress can only be made through solidarity. Thus it is important to theorise materiality. In so doing, the feminist critic-activist examines the specifics of the historical and political moment, economic circumstances of the writer of autobiography, her race, class and sexuality. It does seem that politically, the perceived sameness of Third World women’s oppression creates a singularity or solidarity that renders this ‘group’ a force to be reckoned with in a way that individualising the material differences between each constituent person never could. From that perspective, the political aims of a group could appear to negate the material differences between the women in the autobiography and fiction I explore, even if they all have some issues in common.

However, if theory or literature make any inroads into catalysing political change, then the opposite may be true; that the unique stories of various separate, individual women have their power, too. In fact, a double front might assail a repressive status quo: the singular view of a mass of people understood politically as Third World women (even though they live on different continents) or in other ways marginalised women, combined with a consciousness generated or nurtured by theory and literature of the material differences experienced by every single woman who is being considered part of the whole movement can catalyse change. It may be that the one does not negate the other, but strengthens it by virtue of our ability to see the individuals that constitute the group. Thus life writing is expressive of individuality yet is also capable of being placed within a theoretical framework. These individuals, the writers or their characters, can be seen as sitting in the centre of concentric circles looking outward to ever larger circles which represent family, community and nation. Looking inward, identity, gender and the politics of self-representation will be the focus of my analysis of the texts themselves.

Talebearing

Although generic variation emerges from writer to writer in this study, their initial trajectories are somewhat similar: listening becomes telling and telling becomes written self-representation. There is a comparable progression for these writers, Southern African and American southern, from an old oral tradition to individual storytelling to the writing of autobiographical narrative and other genres. From a Eurocentric perspective, the cultural implications of an oral tradition are value-laden because of colonialist associations with 'primitive' societies and the privileged position they (white westerners) accorded the printed word as an indicator of intellect

and sophistication. Today, in the aftermath of the postcolonial era, once trivialised orature is in the process of being recuperated and valorised.⁵⁰

In the work of all four writers, elements of the heard story, legend, sermons, folk and gospel songs, are to varying degrees discernible in the written story, sometimes quite subtly and at other times overtly. These echoes of oral artistic production make for a layer of richness in texture that goes beyond the usual elements of written narrative; this richness includes a musicality of language, authentic speech patterns and specific dialect, and a consciousness of performance. The writer who emerges from a background steeped in orature relies on her ear, on auditory memory, to reflect the heard quality of what she writes. This is true of Head and Wicomb from their exposure to southern African oral traditions and of McCullers from small town Georgia and Allison from her experience of South Carolinian storytelling and her exposure to Southern Baptist sermons. Interestingly, Bessie Head was the only one who grew up in a big city and later moved to a rural part of Botswana when she was a young woman. She encountered traditional Tswana storytelling techniques for the first time as an adult. But the coloured township where she spent her formative years and, in fact, the home of Nellie Heathcote, her foster mother, were places where

⁵⁰ In his *Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Orature* (2007), Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o writes that the term orature has been used variously since the Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu coined it in the early 1970s to counter the tendency to see the arts communicated orally and received aurally as an inferior or a lower rung in the linear development of literature. He was rejecting the term oral literature. His life was cut short by the brutal Idi Amin dictatorship, whose agents poisoned him in Nigeria during the famous *Festac'77*. Pio Zirimu's brief definition of orature as the use of utterance as an aesthetic means of expression remains tantalizingly out there, pointing to an oral system of aesthetics that did not need validity from the literary. The term however has spread, and one reads variously of Hawaiian Orature, Namibian Orature, Ghanaian Orature and many others. Despite the widespread usage, very few have engaged with the term to tease out the various theoretical possibilities in the term. South African sculptor and storyteller Pitika Ntuli is one of the few who have attempted to take the term beyond its Zirimian usage.

In 'Orature: A Self-Portrait', Pitika Ntuli claimed that a fusion of all art forms was the basic characteristic of orature. It was kind of *Gestalt*, the wholeness of all being bigger than the parts that contributed to it. He wrote, 'Orature is more than the fusion of all art forms. It is the conception and reality of a total view of life. It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit' (1988: 215).

conversation, banter and storytelling were constant, according to Eilersen's 1995 biography.

The material, lived reality of all four writers is that they grew up in households that were far from affluent, they were female and were gifted tellers and writers of stories. The challenge of having their work published at all is an area I have explored in the Introduction and Rationale of this thesis where I show that gender and genre figured significantly in the roadblocks they encountered along the way to being published; race was a factor for two of the writers⁵¹, and economic class, that is, the need to make a living, for all of them. Still, they persisted in writing and submitting their work for publication, so they cannot be cast as powerless because their strength is in writing back to the threat of victimisation. Neither are they representative of any totalising category. Each is unique. There are some common precursors to the printed word, in the case of these authors, which evolved from the tradition of the spoken/heard word. Clearly, the society into which the writer is born and in which she grows to adulthood is important. So is the one in which she later chooses to live. It serves this study to look first at early influences and later at autobiography, which Leigh Gilmore (1994) calls 'a discursive hybrid'. This 'discursive hybrid' is their bridge from orality to published fiction and essays, and, in fact, back to autobiography from time to time when they create space in their fiction for self life writing.

Oral Traditions from South Africa and the American South

Storytelling has been a feature of every human society, literate or not, everywhere in the world. There is a fluidity and spontaneity to the story one watches and listens to as it is being told, that cannot be compared to the experience of a story in captivity, the story which has been written down. Francoise Lionnet refers to a

long Western tradition, from Plato to Maurice Blanchot, including Augustine and Montaigne, which conceives of writing as a system that rigidifies, stultifies, kills because it imprisons meaning ... instead of allowing a 'parole vive [living *logos*]' to adjust fluidly to the constantly changing context of oral communication in which interlocutors influence each other... (1989: 3)

Before addressing the mutability of the oral narrative and its vulnerability to recontextualisation by the speaker, it is interesting to note the double standard at work here. On the one hand, the Eurocentric colonists and critics have devalued the maternal heritage of orature in the so-called Third World due to its supposedly irrational, trivial, unsophisticated dimension, yet on the other, the canon of highly sophisticated European male writers seems to have permission to make pronouncements about the protocols of the written word, especially Montaigne, who wanted to write the way he spoke.

Certainly, words on the page are open to interpretation by the reader and how they are understood is affected by connotation, and that implies a measure of variability in how readers make meaning, but nuances in writing are deployed differently than in storytelling. To watch a storyteller's facial expressions, hear the indrawn breath, the changes in intonation or pitch, the phrasing and pauses, see the physical gestures accompanying the tale, connects body and word so much more viscerally and visually than the printed word can. The story changes from telling to telling and is itself performance. Writers who learn their craft in part from an early foundation of listening to or telling stories themselves, effectively convey the body through the word and the word through the body. Perhaps this is the place where we can reconcile the values of literate civilizations and traditions of orality. As Lionnet puts it, 'These central questions of orality and literacy, speech and writing, truth and

⁵¹ I am referring here to Head and Wicomb being of mixed race but must acknowledge that whiteness is definitely a significant factor in the construction of their subjectivity for McCullers and Allison.

hyperbole, transparency and obscurity have become the cornerstone of the cultural aesthetics of many postcolonial writers' (1989: 4).

There is a colonising/modernising dynamic to be examined in terms of pace of life in the postcolonial context which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the places under consideration, the cultural hybridisation that emerged may have speeded up some aspects of life as technology was introduced, but never to the hectic levels seen in urban centres in the mid-twentieth century. We should ask whether the slower pace of life in the rural areas was the perceived legacy of native practices from the perspective of the coloniser, or due to their remoteness. The modernising effect on the lives of black South Africans and on poor whites living on the outskirts of towns or in the countryside in the American south changed the inhabitants' perceptions of time and its relation to productivity and money. When these four writers were growing up, the changing way of understanding time was a fairly new process, so they still had the opportunity to savour long conversations and to listen to and tell stories, before 'taking' the time began to be seen as a waste of time.

Most people in highly industrialized parts of the world who have easy access to the technology of the early twenty first century may only understand intellectually, not from their own formative experience with it, the power of spoken myth, folklore and multiple repetitions of versions of family and community histories with heroes, villains. Gina Wisker devotes considerable space in *Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing* (2000) to acknowledging the connection between folk culture, oral storytelling and written literature as they relate to women writers in Africa, the Caribbean and other postcolonial cultures. Traditionally, women may have been the griottes or storytellers tasked with the responsibility of passing down collective wisdom and morality, but according to Wisker 'their creativity is not

necessarily recognised. Often the women's version of a traditional story was neither collected, passed on nor written down' by the collector, 'frequently a colonialist [who] selected men's versions' (137). Yet since so many stories actually have survived by being passed from mother to daughter, ancient storytelling skills are not entirely lost to women who regardless of colonial interventions kept communicating their body of knowledge through tales.

Not only do all four authors in this study use their own experience directly, as raw material for self life writing, they also extrapolate, basing the experiences of some of their characters on their own experience, fictionalising episodes from their lives to weave into stories and novels. In all the work, regardless of generic label, there are thematic undercurrents that include race, gender, class, religion, politics and language. In addition, elements of setting are crucial to meaning. There are connections between the small town south of 1940s Georgia, and the rural, traditional way of life in Head's Botswana of the 1980s, between Wicomb's early childhood in rural Namaqualand in the western Cape and Allison's small town South Carolina between the 1950s and the 1970s, even though the industrialised world was beginning to encroach on it. This link may account for some of their shared but different experiences with storytelling.

From Orality to Autobiography

The western hegemonic view of a civilisation's value continues, to an extent, to marginalise non-westerners, in this case Africans with a tradition of oral artistic production, and to privilege Eurocentric written literature. A similar denigratory attitude has been taken to storytelling from the American South, especially in poverty-stricken rural Appalachia where standardised schooling was not widely available until well into the twentieth century and the telling of tales served a variety of cultural and

educational purposes⁵². It is only relatively recently that orature has been recuperated and appreciated by intellectuals. It is true of both Southern Africa and the American south that ordinary people have appreciated all along the significance of storytelling.

The American South endures as a culture that empowers such practices of listening and telling. While the celebration of personal narratives is, of course, not the exclusive province of Southerners, storytelling and listening events nonetheless thrive in the South because of the self-conscious privileging of orality, community, and intimacy in the region: through storytelling, members of a Southern community vigorously reaffirm their connection to each other. (Donlon 1995)

In certain African communities, the formal role of preserving the group's history and passing on its customs belonged to men, in others, to women. In almost all communities, African and in the US south, however, the informal remembering and retelling fell to women. The problematic stereotype is that women talk easily, they gossip, and so are natural informal storytellers rather than ceremonially significant. The importance of their efforts in preserving a storehouse of cultural material is immeasurable and, of course, should not be trivialised. It is clear that the next step, following the remembering and retelling of the community's stories is the remembering and retelling of one's own story. This is the bridge from storytelling to written autobiography, should a woman choose to cross it.

Although she is speaking of African women storytellers turned writers, Ketu Katrak's comments (2006: 37) and her quote from Buchi Emecheta can also be applied generally to women storytellers and writers from the southern United States and elsewhere:

The story of women's significant role in preserving oral traditions, and in contemporary times, of revising these traditions for their written creative work is told again and again. Emecheta remarks, "Women are born storytellers. We keep the history ... we conserve things and we

⁵² Ingolf Vogeler writes of an Appalachian peasantry which is 'defined by primarily agricultural occupations, oral and material folk culture, strong familiar ties' and that now, with modernization, '[s]tructurally, they are interrelated with and dominated by the urban society around them' (1975: 223).

never forget. What I do is not clever or unusual. It is what my aunt and grandmother did, and their mothers before them.”[Ama Ata] Aidoo consciously uses oral tradition in her short stories, and in her drama. In an interview she remarks, “One doesn’t have to really assume that all literature has to be written. I mean one doesn’t have to be so patronizing about oral literature. There is a present validity to oral literary communication. I totally disagree with people who feel that oral literature is one stage in the development of man’s artistic genius. To me it’s an end in itself... We don’t always have to write for readers, we can write for listeners... All the art of the speaking voice could be brought back so easily. We are not that far away from our traditions.”⁵³

Ketu Katrak suggests a Bakhtinian connection to her ‘attempt to expand the boundaries of the literary to include women’s oral life stories’ (33). She cites how Bakhtin emphasises ‘the speech aspect of language, utterance’ in the multivocality and heteroglossia of orality (33). The writers in my study nimbly cross generic borders by using orality in their self life writing and in their fiction and essays, in all cases evoking multivocality. Much of their work possesses the hallmarks of orality. To occupy the same space while listening to a speaker allows for the interflow of expression and reception--orality, aurality and performance simultaneously, along with a fluctuating awareness of oneself and one’s fellow listeners as separate individuals, and a consciousness of a sometimes spontaneous, collective audience reaction. Being in the audience of a traditional storytelling has much in common with being in a congregation and listening to the sermon in a place of worship, most particularly because of the strong element of performance in southern Baptist churches in America and some African-influenced Christian churches in Botswana and the Cape. Here is a conflation of theatre and theology which appears in work by all four authors. In Carson McCullers’s novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, the black Doctor Copeland welcomes members of his community to a Christmas gathering at his home and, ironically, tells a sermon-like story about Karl Marx. The chapter in

⁵³ Emecheta’s comments, embedded here in the quote from Katrak’s book, are originally from Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden, (eds.) (1972). *African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 19-27.

Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out Of Carolina* that has to do with the carnivalesque atmosphere of the gospel revival tent is a significant example of church as theatre, as are the hymns and sermons of the delusional Griqua leader, Andries Le Fleur, in Zoë Wicomb's novel *David's Story*. In *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, Bessie Head writes about the hybrid forms of worship that are the result of the London Missionary Society's Christian influence on the original religion of the indigenous people of Botswana.

The writers in this study are stamped with the imprint of an old oral tradition that persisted as recently as the 1960s and 70s and dwindled before being recovered. For McCullers, Head, Allison and Wicomb this foundational experience shapes the course of their storytelling. 'An[other] important literary form transformed by women writers is the autobiographical narrative where the oral, heard story, and the vivid elements of orality are brought into a written story' (Katrak 2006: 33). In 'How I Began to Write', Carson McCullers remembers how she used to write and direct plays when she was a child and have her younger siblings perform them, '[t]he front sitting-room was the auditorium, the back sitting-room the stage' (2005: 249). Head and Allison refer directly in their work to the practice of storytelling; Wicomb, on the other hand, reveals in her ear for Cape Coloured dialogue, her familiarity with the musical quality of Afrikaans-inflected speech as a significant part of her life in South Africa. One example is in Wicomb's 2006 novel *Playing in the Light*, where two women from Cape Town encounter an eccentric, old, Coloured man while on a trip into the countryside. The old man, Outa Blinkoog, meaning Old Man Wink-Eye or Shiny-Eye in Afrikaans, is a caricature of the rural Coloured character; he is a homeless artist and wanderer who makes beautiful pieces from bits of scrap and has no desire for wealth. He tells the women snippets of his own story and switches back

and forth from Afrikaans-inflected English that uses Afrikaans syntax and includes Afrikaans words in amongst English words, ‘In those days I was Baas Pieter van Schalkwyk’s shepherd, started when I was at school – I know the *veld* like the back of my hand – and it was Baas Pieter who called me Outa Blinkoog. Magtig, he says, this talking makes a person hungry, hey’ (88; my underlining of Afrikaans words). In the story ‘Home Sweet Home’ from the story cycle *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, Wicomb draws attention to storytelling fleetingly:

They cut their stories from the gigantic watermelon that cannot be finished by the family in one sitting. They savour as if for the first time the pip-studded slices of the bright fruit and read the possibilities of konfyt in the tasteless flesh beneath the green. Their stories, whole as the watermelon that grows out of this arid earth, have come to replace the world.(1987: 87)

The analogy of eating stories as if they were slices of watermelon invokes a powerful image of transubstantiation; to hear the story was to have it become part of the hearer’s body, her identity. All four writers in this study were fortunate enough to have storytelling become part of themselves and of their writing, living both roles-- being in an audience and being the storyteller, transposing the medium from oral to written form as a kind of narration of the self.

The degree to which the individual belonged to a collective audience fluctuated for these women who experienced a measure of liminality even within their own bodies, among their families and communities, and, of course, as exiles. For the writer with an intense exilic consciousness, the rift between feeling alone amongst a group of strangers and belonging to one body of people is quite significant in terms of the feminist standpoint she brings to bear on her characters’ understanding of their circumstances. Certainly the writers in this study carried with them the paradoxical memory of sometimes belonging and sometimes feeling isolated within the familiar group, even before physically leaving their homes and going into exile. They captured

aspects of this complicated interiority through their self life writing, itself a nomadic process documenting their nomadism.

Carson McCullers's Autobiographical Essays from *The Mortgaged Heart*

In 'The Flowering Dream: Notes on Writing' (*The Mortgaged Heart*: 279)

Carson McCullers spells out her difficulty with the south and establishes her reasons for her voluntary exile from it. '...the South is a very emotional experience for me, fraught with all the memories of my childhood. When I go back to the South I always get into arguments, so that a visit to Columbus in Georgia is a stirring up of love and antagonism'. Later, she adds,

The writer's work is predicated not only on his personality but by the region in which he was born. I wonder sometimes if what they call the 'Gothic' school of Southern writing, in which the grotesque is paralleled with the sublime, is not due largely to the cheapness of human life in the South... In my childhood, the South was almost a feudal society ... To many a poor Southerner, the only pride that he has is the fact that he is white, and when one's self-pride is so pitifully debased, how can one learn to love? Above all, love is the main generator of all good writing. Love, passion, compassion are all welded together. (281)

If going back to her original home simultaneously stirs up love and antagonism for McCullers, and if love, as she says, 'is the main generator of all good writing', then the antagonistic part of the equation is necessary for the nomadic disturbing of set conventions which is a requirement for subversive thinking and action. Love alone is insufficient. Thus the two, love and antagonism, must coexist like yin and yang in order to facilitate new ways of thinking as well as good writing. Together, these factors can lead to material change in the world.

In the short piece 'Home for Christmas' which she wrote for *Mademoiselle*, published in 1949, McCullers recounts an early memory she has of her own nomadic metaconsciousness--that glimmer of self reflexivity experienced and articulated by a precocious child with a philosophical bent. In this sliver of memoir, McCullers

opens up a space that permits a glimpse of her general dissatisfaction with the status quo, an exilic world-weariness or ennui we would not expect in a child. She is sick of the long, hot, boring southern summer and she wonders how ‘it could be that I was I and now was now when in four months it would be Christmas, wintertime, cold weather, twilight and the glory of the Christmas tree? I puzzled about *now* and *later* ... Would the now I of the tree-house and the August afternoon be the same *I* of winter, firelight and the Christmas tree? I wondered’ (233). McCullers juxtaposes her younger brother’s more typically childish concerns with her own musings about time and identity. The references she is about to make to her family and holiday rituals represent the love she associates with home and with good writing. But that is only part of the picture. In addition to the love she associates with where she is (in time and space), it takes agitation, antagonism, dissatisfaction with the present moment to spark her intense introspection. Before she launches into a detailed description of the wonderful smells, tastes and sensations of Christmas at home, she shares her little brother’s words to her as she sits up in the tree-house that August day, ‘You say you are thinking but you don’t know what you are thinking about. What are you really doing up there? Have you got some secret candy?’ (234) Her secret is nothing as sweet, fleeting and momentarily tangible as candy before it has been consumed, but the first flickering of the self consciousness that precedes autobiographical writing.

This episode is recalled from when Carson was a young child and while it moves into the realm of popular culture with descriptions of shopping for gifts, family holiday rituals, decorating, cooking and feasting, as befits an article published in the December edition of a women’s magazine of that era, the core of the piece has to do with thinking about thinking, about identity and thinking about time. Its appeal may be in its hybridity. The author’s ‘formula’ is to mix memoir and philosophy with a

measure of cuteness to appeal to a range of readers of a women's higher end magazine.

Another autobiographical article published in the December 1953 edition of *Mademoiselle* uses the frame of Christmas but paints a quite different picture of young Carson's burgeoning awareness of the grotesque in everyday life: illness, mortality, jealousy and the transformative ability to overcome hostility with love. 'The Discovery of Christmas' is set when the author was five years old and had just recovered from scarlet fever. She and her younger brother had been quarantined in the back room of their house for six difficult weeks. Just as she prepares to celebrate her freedom from quarantine and Christmas, instead of feeling elation, she experiences intense jealousy 'as Mother had deserted me for my hated rival – the new baby sister' (238). The older children have been cared for by Rosa Henderson, a practical nurse who 'hovered over thermometers, potties [and] alcohol rubs' and whose own infant son had died a long time ago. The reader only knows that Rosa is black by her way of speaking and the one place where McCullers identifies her as such, hinting that life in the south was already harsh and less fair for blacks than whites although unspeakable feelings and tragedies could befall either. The author observes, 'At that time there were only the changing tones of her colored voice and the changing walls in the firelight. Except sometimes the baby cried and I felt as if a worm crawled inside me and played the harp to drown out the sound' (239).

Rosa has one remaining son, the teenaged Sherman. Carson, intensely aware of her own recent brush with death, asks if the deceased baby had been sick with scarlet fever, but Rosa answers:

"No. He burned to death on Christmas morning. He was just a baby and Sherman put him down on the hearth to play with him. Then – childlike – Sherman forgot about him and left him alone on the hearth. The fire popped and a spark caught his little nightgown, and by the

time I knew about it my baby was – that was how come I got this here wrinkled white scar on my neck.”

“Was your baby like our new baby?”

“Near ‘bout the same age.”

I thought about it a long time before I said: “Was Sherman glad?”

“Why, what shape of thoughts is in your head, Sister?”

“I don’t like babies,” I said. (240)

The thoughts in Carson’s head are shaped by complicated emotions and, I contend, the adult writer’s heightened sense of her ‘responsibility’ as a southern writer to inject a dose of the gothic, the grotesque into this piece. The author describes placing her baby sister, Bonny, on the hearth and going off to play with fireworks in another room while her parents are out of the house. ‘I knew clearly this was wrong. But, angry and sad, I wanted to do wrong’ (243). When Carson goes back to see if Bonny had burned up, her relief at seeing the baby crawling away from the fire towards the Christmas tree is read as love, pride and reconciliation. Even though the story is compelling and beautifully written, the ending feels somewhat contrived since this piece seems to want to be all things to all people: a slice of southern autobiography replete with the grotesque and a Christmas story ending with grace and references to Jesus and family.

Herein lie some of the challenges regarding how to read self life writing. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, autobiography can never simply tell the story of what happened. There will be interpretations, fabrications and omissions superimposed onto the idiosyncracies of memory that becomes indistinguishable from memory. The title of McCullers’s piece ‘How I Began To Write’, published by *Mademoiselle* in September 1948, suggests just such a complicated recounting and reading. This short article gives an intriguing slice of the author’s story about her own experience of oral storytelling becoming theatre and, soon thereafter, a novel.

The author highlights the family rituals that she herself, as (child) writer and director created around the staging of her stories as plays in the family’s Georgia home. She describes the setting in detail, recalling the very different atmosphere

depending on whether she was staging a show in summer or winter: ‘The front sitting-room was the auditorium, the back sitting-room the stage. The sliding doors the curtain’ (249). She remembers having cocoa after the show in winter and lemonade or orange crush in summer with chocolate raisin cupcakes year round. Her description of her younger siblings’ bad acting or abandoning the stage to go out and play is very funny, as is her wry perception of herself as an increasingly serious thinker and writer after she discovers Eugene O’Neill. She wants to convey a sense of herself as self-educated with eclectic reading tastes and as a clever, somewhat naive, precocious girl who will not for long allow herself to be constrained by the ethos of the small town south.

The concluding paragraph of ‘How I Began to Write’ veers away sharply from humorous memories and plot summaries to the adolescent yearning more characteristic of teenage protagonists in McCullers’s best-known novels. This is where she reveals her innate nomadism, ‘I longed for wanderings ... I dreamed of the distant city of skyscrapers and snow, and New York was the happy mise en scene of that first novel I wrote when I was fifteen years old’ (251). She adds that at that time, she had ‘begun another journey. That was the year of Dostoevski, Chekhov and Tolstoy—and there were intimations of an unsuspected region equidistant from New York. Old Russia and our Georgia rooms, the marvellous solitary region of simple stories and the inward mind’ (251). She highlights the notion that nomadism may have something to do with actual travel but more to do with the changing landscape of the restless ‘inward mind’.

Illumination and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers

From McCullers’s autobiographical revelations about herself as a girl, the link becomes apparent between how she presents herself and her two most significant

adolescent female characters. Versions of herself are models for the characterisations of Mick in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*. In Chapter Two, I will explore in more detail the crossing from self life writing into fiction in these and other novels, but now I will turn to *Illumination and Night Glare: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers*, edited by Carlos Dews (1999).

Illumination and Night Glare was dictated to various friends, family members and secretaries from McCullers's bed in Nyack, New York when she was fifty years old, before she died of her final stroke in 1967. 'Illumination', she says, refers to her creative inspirations and 'night glare' refers to the horrors and tragedies in her life. In his introduction to the book, editor Carlos Dews, problematises this, and by extension, all autobiography:

The telling of her stories, as she remembered them, as they influenced her, is more important than the veracity of the tales she recalled. As an autobiography, "Illumination and Night Glare" is a complex mixture of memory, latter-day self-revision, de-mythologizing, and re-mythologizing and is an attempt by its author to memorialize herself in a way that is true to her own self-perception though not always consistent with strict biographical record. (xxi)

The construction of the book is fragmentary and has the feel of a first draft. Dews admits that '*Illumination and Night Glare* presents an editor with a myriad of difficult decisions, including how to deal with the free-associative style of the narrative, the difficulty in discerning Carson's intention about what to include in the appendices she suggested, and the impact of McCullers's penchant for exaggeration' (xvii). While reviews were mixed⁵⁴, and for good reason, it is especially interesting to read the memoirs of a middle aged woman reflecting on her entire life and comparing them to

⁵⁴ *Publishers Weekly* says 'McCullers's disappointing unfinished autobiography should spark further debate over the ethics of publishing incomplete and flawed posthumous works by heralded authors' and 'the book remains a perplexing pastiche, and the author herself emerges as self-absorbed and dull'. Richard Gray of the *Times Literary Supplement* calls the book 'an extraordinary document. Dictated in an idiomatic, associative style, it exposes the doubleness of McCullers's life...[It is] a rich mine of information for anyone interested in McCullers, and American literary life in the 1950s, these memoirs are also a testament to the courage and sheer love of life of their author'.

the self life writing of the author as a young woman writing about her childhood and adolescence. The first third of the book consists of autobiography, the second section consists of dozens of letters and is entitled 'World War II Correspondence of Carson and Reeves McCullers'. The volume also includes Appendices, Bibliography and Index. The outline of 'The Mute' comprises most of the final third, so 'Autobiography' is somewhat of a misnomer in the case of this and many other books ostensibly belonging to the genre.

An interesting difference between McCullers's early and late autobiography is her pacing of the action and the level of detail in the description. In this last book, the author hurries through details she would once have slowly wrought, which would have evoked a fuller and more nuanced picture. This is not to suggest that the writing offers unsatisfying or cartoon-like sketches, rather that because of her failing health, the author has to use a greater economy of words than she did when she was young and more vigorous, and while they are fewer in number, those word choices are very evocative. To illustrate:

Thomas Wolfe is another author I love, partly because of his wonderful gusto in describing food.

The next and possibly one of the strongest influences in my reading life is [Dostoevsky]—Tolstoy, of course, is at the top.

As I grew older my love for Katherine Mansfield somehow was lost, and I seldom read her now, but I must add here that as a critic she is often dead right ... I like books small and fastidious as Vermeer, and while we are on the subject of painting, I must say that I deplore my lack of understanding of works of visual art. I think I get along better with the moderns. Henry Varnum Poor, who by the way is a neighbour of mine and has painted me several times, I get along with beautifully. Also I covet certain Epsteins which I can't afford. (59)

There is an undeniable rushed and patchwork quality to this and some of her other pieces of free association that do not quite cohere. This may be caused by a real sense of time urgency as well as the lack of later editing and shaping by McCullers herself.

In terms of the plot chronologies of the shorter pieces that constitute *Illumination and*

Night Glare, the general trajectory of most of these memories moves forward in an arc with very few flashbacks or digressions, thus each piece is internally coherent but it is difficult to discern any pattern for the placement of the episodes themselves within the larger volume. A number of the pieces tell stories of McCullers's friendships with famous writers like Tennessee Williams and Isak Dinesen. The anonymous writer of the *Publishers Weekly* review calls these references 'exercises in name-dropping and benign gossip' but that is a mean spirited comment, considering McCullers's standing in the literary community, her very real and mutually supportive relationships with various artists, and, of course, her sense of her imminent mortality. She is a different writer at this stage of her life, and this book is a reminder that autobiography is a fascinating conundrum.

Autobiographical aspects in Bessie Head's work

Bessie Head and Carson McCullers both experienced the illuminations and night glare of having a highly creative and depressive exilic consciousness. Like McCullers, a collection of Head's short pieces, *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990), was published after her untimely death in 1986 at the age of 49. Also posthumously published was *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1990), a collection of previously unpublished short works. In addition, another previously unpublished manuscript written between 1960 and 1962, *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*, edited by M.J. Daymond, was published in 1993. *The Cardinals* is a novella that can be described as containing self life writing eruptions or disruptions⁵⁵. Daymond suggests in her introduction that at one level, this novella is a kind of cliché

⁵⁵ One can read for these texts' autobiographics, a term coined by Leigh Gilmore to define 'a reading practice [which] is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation... I think of autobiographics as operating within texts that have not been seen as autobiographies' (1994 : 42).

or fairytale, and at another, it makes space for a complex interweaving of episodes of fictionalised autobiography.

The Cardinals is the only piece of long fiction--a bildungsroman--that Head set entirely in South Africa. Head tells the story of the protagonist who is an unwanted baby girl given to a poor, loving, childless foster mother and brutal, alcoholic foster father in a Coloured slum near Cape Town. The woman decides to call the girl Miriam. Miriam does not attend school but at the age of ten, a poverty-stricken shack dweller who is a charming old man, teaches her to read and write. There is a suggestion that Miriam's literacy will be her route to a better life, as if the ability to write her name will help her to establish a grasp on her identity, but first she must endure terribly harsh conditions. When her foster father tries to rape her one night, she runs away from their shack and wanders until she is found and taken to hospital and finally assigned a social worker and a new foster family in a different township. In a shockingly unfeeling bureaucratic moment, Miriam 'was given a new name and birth date and registered as Charlotte Smith, born 6th January, 1939' (10). Head reminds the reader that identity is both contingent and in flux, and this she knows too well from her own experience. These particular identity shifts seem possible only in an explicitly postcolonial context where the colonised can be owned by being named and are more broadly facilitated by the female adoption process in particular.

Later in the novella, once Charlotte has grown up and further educated herself, she applies for a job at a newspaper called *African Beat*. In this, the life of the protagonist closely mirrors that of the author and has to do with journalistic writing and activism for social justice, a dangerous pursuit under the apartheid regime. When Charlotte is about to enter the editor's office for an interview, a handsome older journalist, Johnny, dubs her Mouse. This name sticks and she retains it for the rest of

the story. The random assigning of names underscores the power wielded by the namer over the named. 'Mouse', while a trivialising nickname is also a term of endearment.

The frame of the novella operates as the vehicle into which Head inserts the romantic story, seemingly entirely fictional, of Johnny, the poor fisherman, and Ruby, the beautiful, well off daughter of upper middle class parents. But this short story which appears suddenly in the midst of the larger framing story of Mouse and Johnny is an additional layer of fictionalised fanciful resolution of Bessie Head's existential dilemma: who were *her* parents? And, not knowing them, who then is she? She inserts a fairytale of personal wish fulfilment into an already semi-autobiographical novella. The match between Ruby and Johnny of the fairytale is doomed because the lovers are from opposite ends of the social spectrum, although race is not a factor here as it is in Bessie Head's actual parents' case. When Ruby cries out to Johnny, 'Love me! Love me! Love me!' (45) it is as if Head is calling out to her dead mother and absent, unknown father demanding the love she has never been given. Ruby may even be voicing Head's plea to her reader. The absence of love is conflated with the absence of an identity.

Head, who never knew her own father, only that he was a black man guilty of contravening the Immorality Act forbidding sexual relations between blacks and whites, uses this story to fabricate her own perverse personal and political resolution to the problem of the anonymous father. She has Mouse and Johnny fall in love with each other, neither of them knowing that he is her father although the story ends before actual consummation. Breaking the incest taboo is another form of crossing over into the territory of immorality (as Head's own parents did by crossing racial boundaries). It highlights how breaking sexual prohibitions is criminalised under the

laws of apartheid that seek to maintain white power. Both Mouse and Bessie Head are coloured women, the products of relations deemed illicit by the unjust laws that Head hated passionately. Both struggle with self-definition and fluctuating, liminal subjectivities in the context of having suffered all their lives long both materially and existentially. Head's purpose in taking such a risk by writing this is to show Johnny and Mouse's right to love each other as symbolic of all the other rights withheld from human beings in South Africa; it legitimises Head's right to exist. She is a nomadic pathbreaker who does not shy away from writing sometimes shocking work in order to disturb complacent thinking.

The short pieces that follow the novella are a generic mixture labelled as 'meditations and short stories' that illuminate some of Head's deepest concerns about herself and about South Africa. Much of her writing reveals that she never felt at home in South Africa, the land of her birth, and it brings to the fore her sense of her own liminality as an outsider in Botswana—a woman nowhere at home and always a nomadic thinker in the sense that Braidotti would use the term. Her nomadism is easily discernible from reading her first person autobiographical accounts of her life as well as from her fictionalised autobiography and the variety of other genres she employs.

A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings reveals the extent to which autobiography functions as a bridge between storytelling and other overlapping genres, but shows also that there is, of course, no direct progression in a single direction once the writing life is well under way. Autobiographic disruptions may appear at any time in any of her work. The first piece in the collection, just two and a half pages long, is a summarised autobiography of her birth and origins called 'Notes

From a Quiet Backwater 1” (1982). As a first person history of the writer by the writer, this piece fits with more traditional notions of autobiography.

I have always been just me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself.

I was born on July 6, 1937, in the Petermaritzburg mental hospital. The reason for my peculiar birthplace is that my mother was white and my father was black (19).

Head’s sparse, matter-of-fact style here belies the enormous emotional backstory that she hints at, oddly enough by omitting verbal embellishments. The power of this writing is in its apparent simplicity.

Her second short piece in *A Woman Alone* is entitled ‘Let Me Tell a Story Now...’ (1962) and hints at the storyteller’s compulsion. Whether the ‘Me’ or ‘Now’ of the title has the emphasis is open to speculation; maybe the emphasis ought to fall on ‘Story’. Perhaps the speaking subject and the issue of time have equal urgency or emphasis. The style of this piece is rambling and conversational; it is a writer writing about writing. It takes Head a few pages before she gets around to explaining the outline of a story she would like to write; in fact, in saying that she wants to tell this story, she actually does so all the while apologising for calling herself a writer yet not writing enough or well enough. But, she promises, ‘[i]f I had to write one day I would just like to say *people is people* and not damn white, damn black. Perhaps if I was a good enough writer I could still write damn white, damn black and still make people *live*. Make them real. Make you love them, not because of the colour of their skin but because they are important as human beings’ (23). The writer’s metaconsciousness of the writing process makes her nomadism apparent. When she is in her right mind, as she seems to be here, she sees writing as an instrument to transcend prejudice. She will eventually undertake an actual border crossing into Botswana, but before ever going anywhere, her curious inwardness and questioning of the status quo reveal the nomadic thinking that characterises her work. This piece ends with Head underscoring

her need to write, and she does this in italics for emphasis, ‘...because *I’ve just got to tell a story*’ (24). The storyteller’s compulsion in Head’s words bring to mind Dorothy Allison’s first story in the collection *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* (1995) which begins with ‘let me tell you a story’ and whose first section ends with ‘The story becomes the thing needed’ (3). For both writers, their need to tell may originate with an autobiographical impulse, but it spreads out rhizomatically into other genres and back into versions of their own self life writing again.

Most of Head’s *A Woman Alone* is written in the first person and in a variety of different styles. In amongst writing easily identifiable as autobiography, there are also political, philosophical and anthropological pieces peppered with rhetorical questions and factual information presented in a speculative tone. However, generic borders are constantly shifting in this collection and what starts out as an essay apparently on literature or anthropology, will open up from time to time to include autobiography. Similarly, a piece that by its title suggests theology, ‘God and the Underdog’ (1968), makes space for memoir and political activism. On the other hand, in the political piece ‘An Unspeakable Crime’ (1963), Head asks disconcerting rhetorical questions, but makes no overt mention of her own, individual lived experience as a Coloured woman under apartheid:

Are the whole mass of Coloureds intentional supporters of this intolerable status quo? Have they ever had a chance? Have they been conditioned like dogs to accept whatever comes to them? Have they lived too long in abysmal poverty and hopelessness so that nothing matters anyway? (25)

There is no hint of the autobiographical *I* in this essay, while the very next one, ‘A Gentle People’ (1963), begins, ‘When I first came to Cape Town in 1958, my friends told me that Cape Town would weave a spell around me and I should never be able to leave it. If I went away, they said, I would always come back’ (26). *A Woman Alone* is hard to categorise, even though its subtitle is ‘Autobiographical Writings’. This

subtitle requires that the reader interrogate the issue of the subject position within autobiography. It provides an opportunity for changing preconceptions about who is telling whose story and how she chooses to frame it.

Although it appears that Zoë Wicomb was only introduced to Bessie Head's writing after she left South Africa for the United Kingdom, Head, born about a decade before Wicomb, can be seen as Wicomb's literary predecessor.⁵⁶ Both women are intimately familiar with city and country iterations of Coloured life under apartheid, although Head's experience in South Africa was more concentratedly urban before she went into exile in rural Botswana, and both use the two way bridge of autobiography from roots in orality to other pathbreaking genres in their published work. Head's talent for listening and then recording is at its most obvious in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, where she interviews a variety of Batswana villagers. Her approach is anthropological, that of a fascinated outsider, but what she writes is literary non-fiction rather than the work of a social scientist. She does what a West African griotte does; she acts as an interviewer who is also a scribe who undertakes the recording of oral history. Where the griotte might sing or recite stories from the past in order to preserve them, Head writes them down, and where the griotte is a member of the tribe who is participating in the creation and preservation of her people's stories, Head is an outsider, an 'other'. Although she often idealises Botswana as a place of peaceful cooperation and hospitality, it was her life's challenge to work through the psychological effects of exclusion that she carried with her constantly. By living among them and conducting these interviews, her understanding of the Bamangwato tribe of Botswana becomes so internalised that she moves between this particular orature-inspired genre and the writing of short stories, essays

and novels, making space in the interstices for self-representation. Head incorporates into her novels fictionalised characters based on her interviewees and what she learns from them; history, legend, and details of tribal and postcolonial social and cultural life are woven into her work to create an innovative narrative form.

Head received her formal education in South Africa, and therefore in the Western, particularly British colonial tradition, ‘hence, what we are to understand is that Head combined Western literary and African storytelling methods in writing the stories—she calls them tales very advisedly—that comprise *The Collector of Treasures [and other Botswana Village Tales]*. One very evident Western technique in these stories is her conflation of history and several oral accounts into single stories’ (Thomas 1990: 95). As her writing develops, she shows increasing skill at wending a nomadic stylistic path in which she observes and evocatively describes events external to herself and also turns deeply inward and writes about the workings of her mind. In this, she is unique for an African woman writer of her era.

Head’s studied objectivity in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* is in contrast to her emotionally-charged, intricate descriptions of her perception of people’s methods and motives in her autobiographical novel, *A Question of Power* (1973). She rarely directly challenges the accepted tribal method of social, economic or legal interaction in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, rather presenting her findings as reportage and, in this instance, leaving the reader to judge the extent to which ancient sexist customs persist and are aggravated by the interim eighty years of British colonial rule and post-independence corruption. Her self-described ‘coolness’ here is strongly contrasted with the passion of writing back to oppressive forces in most of her other work.

⁵⁶ ‘Zoë Wicomb interviewed by Eva Hunter, Cape Town, 5 June 1990,’ in *Between the Lines II: Interviews with Nadine Gordimer, Menan du Plessis, Zoe Wicomb, Lauretta Ngcobo*, eds. Eva Hunter and Craig MacKenzie, Grahamstown (S.A.), National English Literary Museum, 1993, p.88

Head's second novel, *Maru*, contains some autobiographical eruptions, while her third novel, *A Question of Power* (1974), is Head's self life writing in the form of a thinly fictionalised autobiographical account of her own descent into madness. Demons figure prominently in the nightmare world of *A Question of Power*, which Head scholars agree is, among other things, an autobiographical rendering of a period of 'great stress and depression' (Lionnet 1993) and 'relates to her own breakdown and mental illness' (Wisker 2000: 164). Still, the work has been categorised as a novel and Elizabeth, the protagonist, is not Bessie. Already a liminal figure, an outsider by virtue of her gender, race, and class, an exile, having left South Africa for Botswana, Head reveals herself and her protagonist, Elizabeth, to be outside of sanity also. Her liminality has to do here with madness. If the white, Western, male, heterosexual has been held up as the apotheosis of the healthy and normal, then a black, female body would be the ideal place find its opposite--madness. In Chapter Two, I will explore the link between body issues and questions of sanity/madness. On the one hand, it is interesting to examine insanity from the perspective of postcolonial theory and consider the extent to which the colonisers drove the colonised, especially women, mad; on the other hand, it must be acknowledged that some writers, certainly Bessie Head, embraced madness as a site of elevated consciousness, terrifying and painful, yet enlightening.

In Head's novel, as he attends to Elizabeth, who has had a nervous breakdown, the principal of the local secondary school empathises, but cannot really know the depth of her psychic despair,

"I suffer, too, because I haven't a country and know what it's like. A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns."
She tried to raise her leaden head: "I want to tell you something," she said "There's something torturing me. There are strange undercurrents and events here..."(1974:52)

In this novel, the shifting mental stability of the protagonist underscores the dynamic nature of self-representation and the indeterminacy of identity. There will be innate and external shapers of identity over the course of a life. Among other reasons, Elizabeth's insanity stems from the fact that she has fled a mad and hostile place, apartheid-era South Africa. The craziness of that country's racist hegemony is almost contagious as it oppresses people from without, attempting to justify the unjustifiable with laws, codes and acts of parliament. The violently deracinating effect of having to leave the land of one's birth is what the principal is referring to when he acknowledges that 'refugees have nervous breakdowns'. Mental illness also threatens to erupt from within Elizabeth, genetically passed down by her late mother and held in front of her from the time she is thirteen years old:

As soon as Elizabeth arrived at the mission school, she was called to one side by the principal and given the most astounding information. She said:

"We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native." (1974: 16)

This is apparently almost precisely what was said to Bessie Head when she arrived at St. Monica's boarding school. The principal's warning is really a prediction. Head is told that her genetic material means it is almost inevitable that she will 'get insane' even if she is 'very careful'. The evidence for this, according to the principal, is in her mother's sexual aberration, not in a diagnosable, treatable disease. The question about her mother ('a white woman') is whether they 'had to lock her up' because she chose to seek affection in the arms of a black man (called a 'boy'), and that was deemed to be abnormal behaviour or whether Elizabeth's mother was, in fact, suffering from some pathology and needed treatment in a mental hospital, her interracial sexual encounter notwithstanding. Either way, Head's detailed descriptions of nightmarish

descent into an alternate consciousness are terrifying. She vividly recounts how it felt for her to be sucked into that downward spiral. In this autobiographical novel, Augustine's question arises again and again, 'How can the self know itself?' At various places in the book, the self has no reliable points of reference, and this is what works so effectively to represent the unmoored *I* which does not deny that the self can know the self, but presents as a different self by turns.

In *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth's material circumstances are fraught; she is the poor, single mother of a young child who has left a troubled past in apartheid-era South Africa for a remote Botswanan village. She does not speak the local language and has yet to come to understand the local customs. A stateless exile, she is adrift. Depending on one's perspective, a person in these circumstances is either unmoored or unencumbered. No wonder she feels, alternately, that she is losing her grip on reality as well as being offered glimpses of another reality.

Bessie Head manages to describe the indescribable with great impact in this book. 'It is significant that Head writes after madness rather than within madness, and is thus able to use the trope strategically... She persistently confounds the assumed differences between reader and writer, fiction and autobiography, and history and story as she writes and rewrites her relationship to madness' (Kapstein 2003: 73). She retained so much of the intensity of her psychic/psychotic experience that she was able to recapture it, once she felt more stable, quite powerfully in words that unsettle the reader's expectations of form and content. These are not ravings, they are glimpses into a different plane or place, a form of breakthrough.

A Question of Power is a groundbreaking novel in its departure from conventional plot structure and narrative approach. The disjointedness of the text itself is a modernist narrative strategy that mirrors Elizabeth's fragmented psychic

state. Stylistic inconsistency characterises the work, with portions reading variously like magical realism, third person autobiography, philosophy, notes on agriculture and development, historical and social commentary. Head's writing style veers away from established patterns in literature and in breaking with form, the author reflects her character's break with accepted reality. She establishes a connection between madness and dreaming that is linked to creativity.

One might expect a novel that reveals the workings of a fractured mind to turn only inward and focus on Elizabeth's individual subjectivity divorced from influences perceived to be extrinsic, but Head contextualises the madness within a wider political framework. The author's lived experience as well as her genetic predisposition conspired to cause her psychotic break, so the precursors, '[T]he details of life and oppression in South Africa' (1974: 16), are integral to the story of Head's and Elizabeth's breakdown and breakthrough. Her life leading up to the breakdown is fairly superficially, chronologically glossed over, beginning with, 'For a few years she quietly lived on the edge of South Africa's life' to her joining a political party which was subsequently banned, to her eventually becoming 'a stateless person in Botswana', but not before '[s]he married a gangster just out of jail'(18) and '[a]fter a year she picked up the small boy and walked out of the house, never to return. She read a newspaper advertisement about teachers being needed in Botswana. She was forced to take out an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the "never to return" clause...It was like living with permanent nervous tension...' (19). Once the narrator shares details of Elizabeth's arrival in Motabeng, Botswana, the frenetic pace of the background-establishing narrative slows considerably.

The scope of the third person narrator's gaze is initially panoramic, becoming incrementally narrower, and, ultimately, minutely focused inside Elizabeth's body and

mind. She is described as having lived many incarnations in preparation for some unnamed revelation for which she seems, or perhaps, feels, never ready: ‘Other nations, harsh climates, high peaks of endeavour and suffering had shaped her soul’

(38). On the one hand, Elizabeth keeps in mind the centuries of her soul’s evolution,

while at the same time [she is]aware of the precarious balance – there was also the village level of life, witchcraft and all the hidden terrors of darkness. The sharp edge of it had become blurred over in most advanced societies. People had their institutions, which to a certain extent protected them from power-lusting presidents for life with the ‘my people’ cult. Africa had nothing, and yet, tentatively, she had been introduced to one of the most complete statements for the future a people could ever make: Be ordinary. Any assumption of greatness leads to a dog-eat-dog fight and incurs massive suffering. She did not realize it then, but the possibilities of massive suffering were being worked out in her. (39)

Attention in the text to grandiosity as well as minutiae mimics the attention shifts that Elizabeth experiences. Head has her narrator notice and comment on absolutely everything that crosses Elizabeth’s mind, from political observations about Africa, to ‘the village level of life’, to ‘hidden terrors’. Elizabeth’s mind is a battleground; her insanity is, by its nature, egocentric, and she will become aware that ‘the possibilities of massive suffering were being worked out *in her*’ (my italics). Is this because of her assumption of greatness, as the excerpt above suggests? According to her unique cosmology, she incurs massive suffering for acknowledging a raging struggle at the site of her embodied mind, ‘in her’. In other words, she may fear that by not being able to be ordinary, she is making herself a target for suffering, but cannot do otherwise. She perceives herself as chosen.

Gillian Stead Eilersen refers to a letter written by Head to Randolph Vigne (a writer friend from Cape Town) and later published in the *Southern African Review of Books*. Eilersen introduces this excerpt from the letter saying, ‘She was convinced that she had an important role in the spiritual development of the universe; that her strange birth and existence were important pieces in the puzzle of life: “Actually I am not the

kind of person that's just born for being born sake. It's very significant that I've been born in Southern Africa. All these years I've been trying to find the purpose in it and true enough there's smoke all around but bless me if I can find the fire.'” (Eilersen 1995: 84-5) Head continues to follow the smoke in search of the source. Looking for the fire is her mission and, to people on the outside, her problem. Going mad may even be the only healthy response to having suffered in South Africa and then immersing herself in the struggle for her own survival as well as her young son's in Botswana. Of course, this is not a conscious choice, but a kind of default mode, however, not necessarily a terrible trial as she describes it in this instance. In the same letter to Vigne, Head writes:

Figure it out – I might have really gone round the bend. I mean people who get visions and see a gigantic light descend on them from the sky can't be all there but if so I feel mighty happy. If one is happy and cracked it's much better than being unhappy and sane. (Eilersen 1995: 84)

The attempt to convey this kind of inner complexity can be most authentically, believably undertaken by the person who has experienced it. It is the case for all four writers in this study, and, on reading *A Question of Power*, all the more so for Bessie Head in how she offers access to a hard-to-access place. ‘Indeed, even in the narrowest and most ambivalent sense, writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for’ (Gilmore 1994: 40). It reveals a certain refusal of victim status to acknowledge, in writing, one's own vulnerability. To the extent that the character Frieda in Zoë Wicomb's story cycle *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* may be a fictionalised version of the author as a young woman, one can safely say that Wicomb is also writing her acknowledgement of her own, unique vulnerability.

How it Looks, How it Sounds: Self-Representation in Zoë Wicomb's 'A Clearing in the Bush' and 'A Trip to the Gifberge'

Before examining specific stories for their alleged autobiographical disruptions or to attempt to assign generic labels, it is important to look at the entire story cycle. The ten stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) have been referred to by Barend Toerien as 'episodes of a novel, a kind of Bildungsroman and a carefully structured one at that' and Eva Hunter, in her 1993 interview with Wicomb refers to the collection as 'a series of pieces rendered novel-like' (80). In many of the short stories in this cycle, including 'A Clearing in the Bush' and 'A Trip to the Gifberge', Zoë Wicomb evokes the storytelling tradition of her rural community in the Western Cape. Thus, setting and voice, since the author has the protagonist live in and know intimately the places she herself has lived and known, may sway a reader towards categorising the work as autobiographical. Wicomb also suggests the genre of fictionalised autobiography through her first person narrator/protagonist, Frieda Shenton, whose stories are arranged chronologically from her Namaqualand childhood, to her time at university, to her exile in England and visits home as an adult. Much of Frieda's background and character are modelled on Wicomb's own life and experiences. But there are deliberate logical gaps between stories and characters and ways in which Wicomb draws attention in the work to its own createdness. In particular, the mother who is dead in early stories is alive in the last story. She registers her disapproval of her daughter's writing, referring to her making up 'those terrible stories' (182) yet accusing her of 'us[ing] the real. If I can recognise places and people, so can others, and if you want to play around like that why don't you have the courage to tell the whole truth?' (172) In structuring the story cycle this way, Wicomb problematises genre using a strategy which blends self life writing, metafictionality

and a cycle of connected short stories with spaces and ruptures between them which add a postmodern discontinuity to the structure that disrupts expectations.

The story cycle *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is, according to Stephan Meyer, 'made up of whole, fully crafted short stories that flow into each other to loosely evoke the form of a novel' (2002: 184). The gaps between the stories as well as unresolved questions about and the autobiographical nature of the book destabilise the coherence one might expect from the traditional novel form. Wicomb says in her 2002 interview with Meyer and Olver, with a reference to Virginia Woolf, how material conditions dictated the form of her first book for her:

With a small child and no room of my own (let alone so many guineas per year) the short story was the obvious choice. Only after completing the first two stories did I think in terms of an extended work with the same central character. Then I grew interested in the gaps between the stories, the negative semantic space that is my protagonist's life in England. And yes, I flirted with autobiography because that is what black women write, in a sense claiming the pejorative label for myself. That a work in which a character is dead and then reappears many years later could be called autobiography nevertheless came as a shock. (184)

Wicomb is referring to the fact that Frieda's mother is dead and her father, a widower, is doing his best to raise a teenage daughter alone in 'When the Train Comes', but her mother reappears in the final story of the collection, 'A Trip to the Gifberge', and it is her father who has died. The unexpected reunion of Frieda, the exile visiting home, with her very critical, larger than life mother is another instance of Wicomb's disrupting generic boundaries and embracing ambiguity in her work. Rob Gaylard points out in his 2000 article, 'This deliberately undercuts any attempt to read the stories mimetically, or as thinly disguised autobiography, and lays bare their fictiveness'. Wicomb's stories allow for the kind of nomadism that invites fluidity and surprises.

The story 'A Clearing in the Bush' switches back and forth from Frieda Shenton's first person point of view, with its self-conscious correctness, to Tamieta's third person perspective, which evokes the casual conversational style of the *plaasjapie*, or country bumpkin storyteller. Frieda is a student at the University of the Western Cape, a segregated university for Coloured students. Tamieta is a Coloured woman who works on campus, asserting somewhat arrogantly that 'it was only right that she should be chosen to run the canteen at the new Coloured university' (46). Both women, the young student and the middle-aged worker, are originally from the arid, sparsely populated countryside of Little Namaqualand where the Coloured population has its mixed roots in the original Griqua or Khoi people who predated the European colonists, as well as other black African tribes and white settlers, some British and others Afrikaners of Dutch or French Huguenot descent. Although these people speak Afrikaans and worship following strict, puritanical Dutch Reformed Church practice just as their white Afrikaner countrymen do, they are segregated and deprived of rights because of their mixed bloodlines. Their ancestral lands have been appropriated by the colonisers and they have literally and figuratively been pushed out to the margins of society. This background is part of both Frieda's and Tamieta's heritage.

They may have their racial heritage in common, but there is a nuanced class-consciousness that separates the privileged student, Frieda, whose parents insisted on raising her to speak, read and write English rather than Afrikaans, as did Wicomb's, seen from the working class Tamieta's perspective. They may both come from the same rural part of the world, but their cultural-material circumstances separate them and position them differently. Tamieta recognises Frieda:

She casts a resentful look at the girl just sitting there, waiting for her coffee with her nose in her blinking book. Tamieta knows of her father

who drives a motor car in the very next village, for who in Little Namaqualand does not know of Shenton? (46)

When a portion of the story is being told from Frieda's first person point of view, the tone is quite formal and reflects the dual self-consciousness of a well read, intellectually precocious adolescent who is, like so many teenage girls, insecure about her body image and overall attractiveness. Whilst I will interrogate discursive and material constructions of body and mind in Chapter Two in detail, it is necessary to mention Frieda's apparent sense of body/mind polarity here to the extent that it complicates the strand of self life writing in this piece.

In feeling that she must meet certain criteria set up by people other than herself in order to be seen as pretty and therefore as a valuable human being, Frieda is a willing participant, complicit in her own subjugation. At issue, too, is Frieda's understanding that by being clever, a good student, her worth is validated in some circles. The reader feels the presence of the autobiographical *I*. Frieda's experience was once Wicomb's.⁵⁷ She--the character/author--is uncomfortable in her own skin at this stage of her young life and the measures she is willing to take to achieve social acceptance actually exile her from her body. This is a problem intensely felt by young women in adolescence who tacitly permit other people (most overtly men, but certainly women also evaluate other women's looks) to judge their worth based on their external appearance. It is complicated for Frieda because she is a teenager of mixed race in South Africa in the 1960s where the culturally agreed-upon apotheosis of female beauty is singular and impossible for her to achieve: the young, white

⁵⁷ Dorothy Driver, in her article 'Transformation through Art', (1996) refers to an interview with Eva Hunter conducted in 1990 in which Wicomb explains that she has 'drawn extensively' on her own experience and on the people and landscape with which she is familiar. Most of the stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* are set in a Griqua settlement known as Little Namaqualand, although in some the focus shifts to Cape Town, where the author, like the protagonist went to secondary school. The author and the protagonist attended the University of the Western Cape, a tertiary institution designated for Coloured South Africans. Both went to live in the United Kingdom. In addition, it is unlikely that such intensely personal examples of body image dysphoria can have come from anywhere other than

woman who is slim and sleek-haired. All efforts by the 'other' to mould herself to fit this template exacerbate the sense of exile from the body. The tyranny of the situation is that hair, body shape and style of clothing must all fit the established criteria (created by arbiters one does not know but must obey, establishing yet another layer of oppressive colonisation) if this exile is to end in reconciliation and the person reintegrated into herself. This is the ironic, even impossible approach because capitulation is not reconciliation. The other alternative that Frieda can only discover when she is older, is to claim her autonomy over her body. This she will do when she chooses to have an abortion in the title story of the collection, 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town'. But at this point, as far as Frieda is concerned, how you look has a great deal to do with who you are. Knowing that you are intellectually gifted is perceived as a kind of consolation prize or possibly a curse.

Wicomb addresses in this story, as well as in various others, the problem of hair for Coloured women as the tangible, visible emblem of a kind of taming they are expected to undergo or endure in an attempt to move from the margins towards the centre of a society that will not fully allow them centrality. Her female characters, Frieda included, battle their coarse, frizzy hair into submission using harsh chemicals or nylon stocking caps overnight in an attempt to straighten it and make it look more like the western or European model of beauty. Frieda muses:

Since the collapse of the beehive I have not found a satisfactory way of doing my hair although the curve of my flick-ups is as crisp as ever. Fortunately one can always rely on Amami hairspray. I wet my fingers at the tap to tug at the crinkly hairshaft of an otherwise perfectly straight fringe. Cape Town with its damp and misty mornings is no good for the hair. (49)

Although Frieda feels physically inadequate, fat and unattractive, she generates intellectual curiosity and quite a high level of confidence in her critical thinking

having struggled to straighten frizzy hair or to know the sound of pantyhose-encased fat thighs chafing as one walks.

ability. During these episodes of intellectual clarity and maturity the reader has glimpses of Wicomb perhaps contriving to characterise Frieda as representative of herself at that age. One is reminded of De Man's notion of the undecidability regarding the distinction between fiction and autobiography. Certain parts of certain stories seem to be fictive, coinciding with possible 'real life events' that the author experienced, but very much created rather than reported. The author imbues characters and situations with so many layers of meaning that the work calls attention to its own artistry and self-consciousness, in fact, its meta-fictiveness. Wicomb admits that she feels her first collection was 'overwritten'.⁵⁸ Examples that are amenable to consideration from this theoretical stance can be found in the story 'When the Train Comes', when Frieda is preparing to go away to a newly racially integrated high school, and later as a university student in 'A Clearing in the Bush'. In the former, the young teenaged Frieda and her friends vow never to have children (28), and, later, her friend Sarie says that Frieda might meet white boys when she goes to the new integrated high school (33). These references early in the story cycle foreshadow the older Frieda's later illicit relationship with a young white man and her subsequent pregnancy and abortion. Wicomb artfully weaves these connections into different stories to allow them to refer to each other and reinforce the artifice of the pieces which seem to hold together as constitutive parts of a whole at times, and to fall away from each other as distinct and separate at others.

In 'A Clearing in the Bush', on the one hand, Frieda is very conscious of how she imagines the boys in the cafeteria perceive her physical appearance, aware as she is that they objectify the female body. In wanting sexual validation, she is submissive to powerful social forces because of her desire to belong, to come in from the outsider

⁵⁸ Zoë Wicomb interviewed on writing and nation by Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver. *Journal of Literary Studies* 18.1-2 June 2002)

status she confers on herself. On the other hand, she stands out as unusual for a Coloured youngster at all, especially for a girl, because she is breaking free of the dead end stereotype by attending university and taking intellectual strides that will later empower her. Identity is shown through self-representation here as shifting and evolving, not ever finished or cohesive, and part of that fluidity takes into account the gendered connection of word and body.

Frieda wishes she could interpret or translate the meaning of the various wolf whistles that emanate from the back of the room with its 'dark bank of murmuring males' because she wants the whistle that will acknowledge her approach to be appreciative rather than derisive. Every female student is whistled at as she walks across the cafeteria and Frieda so desperately wants positive sexual affirmation that she will not risk the opposite, and stays, instead where she is.

I can only think of crossing the room in slow motion, elephantine, as my lumbering thighs rub together. A deadly silence except for the nylon scratching of left pantyhose against right, then right against left, before the ambiguous sound from the lungs of that bulwark rings plangent in my ears. I do not recognise this register... (52)

The first person, present tense dual consciousness at work here has the feel of fictionalised autobiography, if this is even an appropriate label for the discursive, metafictional character of the stories. There is the sense of a life written about as it is unfolding, that is simultaneously being conveyed from the perspective of experience years later. This eruption or disruption enriches the work by complicating its perspectives. Eighteen year old Frieda Shenton could not know or suspect yet what the adult Zoë Wicomb knows with certainty. The author hints at an inkling of feminist postcolonial awareness emerging in her protagonist. Frieda acknowledges a critical body-consciousness as if from the vantage point of having come to understand it years later, and she hints at the absolute foreignness of Thomas Hardy to a Coloured South

African reader⁵⁹, an awareness that comes in retrospect. A kind of truth is represented, but it is not an attempt at the absolute convergence of perfect recall with emotional and intellectual unity and accuracy, nor should it be. The multiple layers in many of the stories in this collection, and certainly in 'A Clearing in the Bush' allude to the narrator's consciousness of gender roles, particularly the restrictive, body-centred rules applied to girls and women in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Wicomb also alludes to the consciousness of the paradox of being of mixed race in a country that obsessively classifies people according to *a* specific race, yet worshipping the God of the oppressor in His language, Afrikaans, while aspiring to speak the language of the oppressor's colonial predecessor, English. The stories point to the interconnectedness of material reality and the political system for disenfranchised blacks and Coloureds who are impoverished by apartheid. Wicomb looks back on what it was like to grow up female, Coloured, working class and has Frieda, her alter ego, convey the experience through her eyes. This story, and others in the collection, defy definitive generic categorisation beyond a broad label of fictionalised autobiography. In the last story, 'A Trip to the Gifberge' Frieda insists to her mother that her writing is fiction; because her mother knows the characters and the settings as real people and places, she disagrees with her daughter, the author. This disruption is important in provoking questions about genre and the creative making of meaning.

The build to the climax of 'A Clearing in the Bush' is as follows: the chief architect of apartheid, Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, has been assassinated, and Wicomb uses their different reactions to this event to highlight the differences between Frieda and Tamieta. 'Do you feel any sense of horror or shock or even distaste at the assassination?' Frieda asks her friends (54). She wonders out loud about

⁵⁹ In the Eva Hunter interview referenced earlier, Wicomb mentions not having read any South African literature as an undergraduate student. Frieda is working on an essay about *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in

the human condition. Frieda is briefly concerned with her own particular ethical questions around the assassination. Murder is a sin; does the murder of a vicious racist make it less of a sin? Then, thoughts of ‘common humanity’ abandoned, she hurries to finish an essay on Hardy that is due the same afternoon as the Verwoerd memorial service.

Tamieta’s reaction to the assassination is, in fact, a reaction to the propriety of attending the memorial ceremony, rather than to the murder of the country’s supreme racist. She desperately wants to appear to be respectable. In this she and Frieda are surprisingly alike. Tamieta is not, however, in mourning and is not wondering how the deceased’s family must feel; neither would she ever behave like the defiant students who are boycotting the service. This does not make Tamieta entirely shallow, although she does seem delusional from time to time. Her ethical motivators have to do with saving a child from a life of poverty and neglect and so portraying herself as both holy and chosen. Tamieta recalls that ‘It was on her first visit back to Kliprand that she found cousin Sofie merry with drink and the two-year-old toddler wandering about with bushy hair in which the lice frolicked shamelessly’(45). Here again, the wild, bushy Coloured hair must be tamed as if it were a racialised personality flaw to be controlled and made to conform to more acceptable, European standards. After Tamieta tightly plaits the little girl’s hair and gives her a scalp treatment, Sofie agrees to give her daughter, Beatrice, to Tamieta to raise. Tamieta justifies the arrangement and compares herself to the Virgin Mary, chosen as the child’s rightful mother without having to have intercourse or conceive. Tamieta can be pompously self-righteous, for example, when she refers to Charlie, the Coloured Moslem kitchen helper, as ‘this blasphemous Slams’ who ‘know(s) nothing of God and yes it is her Christian duty to

defend her God...' (44) and later, when she 'has to keep a watchful eye on Beatrice whose hands itch for her knitting needles ... (F)or knitting on a Sunday pierces God directly in the eyes. It is her sacred duty to keep that child out of the roasting fires of hell...' (45). Tamieta's phrases echo the inspired sermons and cautionary tales of the country *Dominee* (pastor) in the Coloured church and of the elders, who employ a religious oral tradition that attempts to control the congregation through fear.

If storytelling diminishes as city life grows more hectic, Tamieta acknowledges its rightful place when she takes Beatrice on

yearly visits to Kliprand where Ousie Sofie awaits them with armfuls of presents, not always the sort of thing a girl would want in Town, but so jolly is Sofie in telling her fabulous stories with much noise and actions that they all scream with mirth. A honey mouth that cousin of hers has, full of wise talk which only gets a person into trouble. Just as well she kept to the country; Cape Town would not agree with her. (45-6)

The moral implications of a facility for language might be the temptation to talk too much. At best, this could lead to idle gossip-mongering; at worst, in repressive apartheid South Africa, depending on what it said and to whom, this could attract the negative attention of the security police who may silence the perpetrator.

One of the great distinctions made between rural and urban life in this story is the emphasis on the countryside as a place where meandering, storylike talk, like Sofie's, belongs, and the city, or, in this case, the university campus, as a place of clipped, precise communication, like James's saying, 'We're organising the action for this afternoon's memorial service. We must be sure that nobody goes' (53). This may be Frieda's first exposure to political action. James wants to ensure that the Coloured students do not attend. Their lecturers, professors and the administrators, all white, will surely notice the absence of non-white mourners and understand that their absence is a form of protest against apartheid.

Ironically, Tamieta, who seems to think she knows where everyone does or does not belong, makes the uncomfortable mistake of being, at first, the only Coloured person to attend the university's memorial service for the late Prime Minister Verwoerd. 'Tamieta had no idea that the ceremony was for white people only. Oh, what should she do, and the shame of it flames in her chest' (57). At this stage, only white lecturers and administrators take their seats. She is temporarily relieved when she sees some Coloured students file in, 'She recognises the young men from the seminary, the future Dutch Reformed or rather Mission Church ministers, and her chest swells with relief which she interprets as pride in her people. They slip noiselessly into the third row but there are only eleven and they have no effect on the great expanse between her and the front' (58). The other Coloured students have boycotted the service. Certainly no other ordinary, blue collar workers are attending. Tamieta misreads the cues and finds herself where she does not belong. Liminal subjectivity, the standpoint of the one who does not belong, is crystallised in this moment. Could this be as powerfully expressed by a writer who had not experienced excruciating displacement first hand? Does the fiction open up to make space for the autobiographical at certain moments in the story, and vice versa? Unsettling for the reader is the disruption of the initial identification of Frieda as the autobiographical *I*, if there is one, to an entirely different possibility. The surprise is the switch at the story's end to a niggling sense that Tamieta Snewe, cafeteria worker, may be a third person representation of Wicomb's firsthand experience of liminality.

Truth or Dare: Zoë Wicomb, Dorothy Allison and Fictionalised Autobiography

First listening to stories, then telling them, later writing fictionalised versions of their own experience, Zoë Wicomb's and Dorothy Allison's autobiographical work contain different kinds of self-representation, with a focus on exile as their common

ground. Autobiographical production is the discourse of truth and identity in which the writer makes rhetorical and creative choices and is not simply telling what happened. ‘...I do not understand autobiography to be any experientially truer than other representations of the self or to offer an identity any less constructed than that produced by other forms of representation simply because the autobiographer intends the subject to correspond to herself or himself’ (Gilmore 1994: 25).

In her memoir, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Dorothy Allison concurs:

I’m a storyteller. I’ll work to make you believe me. Throw in some real stuff, change a few details, add the certainty of outrage. I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have – that story can become a curtain drawn shut, a piece of insulation, a disguise, a razor, a tool that changes every time it is used and sometimes becomes something other than we intended.

The story becomes the thing needed. (1996: 3)

Allison acknowledges her rhetorical choices and the resulting story’s unfixed transformative quality. Her sphere in *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* (1996) is her family, and although she observes and records their customs almost the way an anthropologist-poet might, she does not explore much beyond her extended family to the greater community of Greenville, South Carolina, in order to provide additional insight into a particular way of life. Perhaps she does not need to. Her own extended family is large enough and provides a rich enough vein for Allison to mine; also, if her growing up was especially insular, then that would have shaped her in some way. It makes her exilic escape from South Carolina more challenging and, therefore, more heroic.

Fictionalised autobiography contains its own truth, but, of course, is not the representation of ‘real life’ recorded as though by a court stenographer, absolutely accurately. Neither is it the time-, place-, detail-specific record of every interaction

the way that an episode of a reality TV show seeks to portray itself as revealing exactly what happened as it happened. Fictionalised autobiography is confessional writing that has to do with the discursivity of identity. For the four women writers in this study, marginalised as they were, it is useful to examine how each writes in her own voice and the extent to which their writing may be seen as representation. ‘An emphasis on the rhetorical dimension of autobiography indicates its performative agency. Agency, as performance (that is, as discourse), has been identified as the action of the subject. How might autobiographical agency, identified in the rhetoric of truth telling, recast the autobiographical subject?’ (Gilmore 1994 : 25)

In the 2002 interview with Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver quoted earlier in this chapter, Zoë Wicomb obliquely addresses Gilmore’s question about autobiographical agency. She examines, with a reference to Virginia Woolf, how material conditions dictated the form of her first book. She focuses on the short story more than the interpellations of autobiography in that particular response, but certainly addresses the issue of labelling her work as self life writing elsewhere. Wicomb’s response to the interviewers’ questions about genre reveals the kind of access to some truth about the social world that is in accordance with nomadic materialist feminism. In explaining her perspective and her choices as a writer who is black, who is a woman, who is limited by her material circumstances, Wicomb sounds a lot like Frieda in the later stories from *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*. Frieda, in the final story, ‘A Trip to the Gifberge’, chooses to emphasize the fictionality of her writing. Of her published work, Frieda says to her mother, ‘But they’re only stories. Made up. Everyone knows it’s not real, not the truth’.

Her mother’s response reveals questions about truth, representation, exile and narration:

But you've used the real. If I can recognise places and people, so can others, and if you want to play around like that why don't you have the courage to tell the whole truth? Ask me for stories with neat endings and you won't have to invent my death. What do you know about things, about people, this place where you were born? About your ancestors who roamed these hills? You left. Remember? (172)

The author and the character have both achieved an acute awareness of how their lot has been conditioned by a combination of external and innate forces. As such, they are more likely to have insight into many different types of power relations, not just those that affect them directly. Although the autobiographical inspiration is apparent, the stories have been fictionalised and Wicomb insists upon her verbal creation being seen as the fabricated art that it is. The contrast between 'this place where you were born' and 'You left' underscores the sharp rift created by physical exile felt by author and character. Rather than experiencing uncertainty about genre as disconcerting here, the indeterminacy so embedded in the work actually enhances it. This approach is wholly nomadic.

Dorothy Allison and 'the story of what happened, or what did not happen...'

In order to decide how to view Allison's departure from the south, as an escape or an act of self-liberation, we need to problematise what home is and what we mean by away and, certainly, the role of memory as these ideas factor into autobiography. A key focus of *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* is on Dorothy Allison's memories of growing up in poverty. Poverty and family are conflated on the time and place axes that represent the 'home' of Allison's childhood. In the essay 'What's Home Got To Do With It?' (2003), Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin write about their readings of Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical narrative, 'Identity: Skin Blood Heart' (1984), pointing out that:

"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of

specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself. (90)

Mohanty and Martin, through their insights into Pratt's narrative, provide a way of reading Allison's complex perceptions of home and the way she chooses to convey them in her self life writing. They remind the reader that early memories of home are iterations of those aspects of what Pratt calls 'growing-up places' that are perceived by the way in which the eye has been taught to see. In other words, although the child's actual experience is being formed by a set of political circumstances or seen through a particular kind of cultural lens, the child herself is pre-political. In retrospect, however, post-politicisation, the adult may come to understand that the race, class and gender struggles, the religious world view of her family, and other factors, foreclose on the possibility of constructing 'a coherent notion of home or her identity in relation to it' (2003 : 90). For the exile, remembering what she had once thought of as 'being home', now from a new standpoint can be disruptive in terms of both spatial relocation and psychic dislocation. This consciousness intensifies the writer/exile's sense of liminal subjectivity and insists on a re-examination of old views. Braidotti would view this re-examination as a nomadic process.

Minnie Bruce Pratt and Dorothy Allison, both women writers of autobiographical narrative who are white, southern and lesbian, find that they must challenge and reinterpret the traces of their respective histories and be aware of its flux, depending on their vantage points. It is important to note that while Allison grew up very poor and extraordinarily aware of a variety of limitations imposed on her by family circumstances and socioeconomic factors, Pratt identifies herself as 'white, middle-class, Christian-raised' (qtd. in Mohanty 2003 :86). In her essay, Pratt writes of a quite different consciousness from Allison's as a young woman:

Raised to believe I could be where I wanted and have what I wanted, as a grown woman I thought I could simply claim what I wanted, even the

making of a new place to live with other women. I had no understanding of the limits I lived within, nor of how much my memory and my experience of a safe space to be was based on places secured by omission, exclusions or violence, and on my submitting to the limits of that place. (Pratt 1984 : 25-26)

The family biography and its accompanying myths, even well into adulthood, may constrain or permit the writer's sense of what is possible, and neither perceived constraints nor permissiveness entitles the writer to a free pass to avoid intense challenges, heartache and, ultimately, growth through nomadism. The course for these writers moves from the individual herself to family to community to the overarching hegemonic practices of nation and then, with varying degrees of struggle, back to the individual herself away, both physically and psychically, from home. For all of the writers in this study 'being home' and 'not being home' change, just as identity and the self are discursive and keep evolving. The way we remember incidents and experiences also changes, and over time, having retold a memory with certain emphases, other details may recede entirely and may just as well never have happened. As we attempt to sort out what we think we mean by 'being home' and who we think we are, we tell ourselves the story of how we want to think we arrived there. This process for writers of autobiography can be read as metanarrative; certainly Dorothy Allison wrestles with Augustine's question '[H]ow can the self know itself?' although she does this obliquely, writing about the dynamic process of becoming as well as the complicated issue of written self-representation. This kind of writing demonstrates performative agency—putting the words onto the page brings a certain version of reality into being.

In *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Allison addresses the overlap of fact and fiction, of unreliable memory, of the subconscious choice to tell oneself a version of events in order to survive a trauma, and the way in which a person's lie can become

her truth. Here is a fascinating convergence of her recognition of psychological pathology and powerful writerly honesty and agency:

Let me tell you the mean story.
 For years and years, I convinced myself that I was unbreakable, an animal with animal strength or something not human at all. Me, I told people, I take damage like a wall, a brick wall that never falls down, never feels anything, never flinches or remembers. I am one woman but I carry in my body all the stories I have ever been told, women I have known, women who have taken damage until they tell themselves they can feel no pain at all.
 That's the mean story. That's the lie I told myself for years, and not until I began to fashion stories on the page did I sort it all out, see where the lie ended and a broken life remained. But that is not how I am supposed to tell it. I'm only supposed to tell one story at a time, one story. (38-39)

The self-reflexiveness that characterises this and many other parts of the memoir undercut any tendency by the reader to confuse story with verifiable fact; we usually expect fiction to be lies or a creatively constructed story populated by made-up characters who play out a plot drawn from the creator's imagination, but there are those who may be disconcerted to find that autobiography is similarly creatively constructed, too. In the piece above, Allison addresses the fact that autobiography is a tangled knot of many threads. She attempts the disentangling in full view of the reader by confronting the problem of the lie, the story, and 'how [she] is supposed to tell it'. In addition, the way in which the author constantly rewrites herself has the reader reconsider the location and identity of the narrator in light of the shifting rhetorical versions of her personal experience. This unsettling writing strategy has the reader hesitate before conflating the identity of Allison the person with the narrator and subject of *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. Disrupting that moment of hesitation, Allison writes, 'Let me tell you a story. Let me tell you the story that is in no part fiction, the story of the female body taught to hate itself' (49) and Paul de Man's pronouncement on the undecidability of the distinction between fiction and autobiography looms large again.

Dorothy Allison's autobiographical novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* can be seen as a story from her life as well as a discourse of truth, gender, power and identity that foregrounds incoherence in a way that flouts the emphasis on patterns of coherence sought by traditional studies of autobiography. Leigh Gilmore attributes the appeal of incoherence to its conceptual affiliation with contemporary feminist theories that stress the historical instability and political volatility of 'women' and 'identity'. Gilmore continues, 'Gayatri Spivak's description of the ongoing tension generated by cultural critique applies here, for the reader/critic of autobiography is being asked to engage in "the persistent critique of what one cannot not want," the critique of a genre that, in effect, constructs a self with a story to tell' (81).

The violent climax of *Bastard Out of Carolina* comes right near the end of the novel, when Bone has moved out to Aunt Alma's place to help her after her breakdown and to find a safe place away from her own stepfather Daddy Glen who had badly beaten her. The temporary peace is pleasant, 'Alma came back to herself slowly. She didn't want to talk much, but then neither did I. Mama came out every afternoon for a while, then every other day, and finally every few days' (278). Daddy Glen shatters the peace simply by arriving at the house while Aunt Alma is outside gardening and Bone is alone in the kitchen. The twelve year old girl is rigid with fear, but does not back down when Glen tells her to get her Mama to come back to him, saying, 'You're gonna have to tell her you want us all to be together again'. Bone's stomach starts to hurt and she balls her sweaty fingers up into fists. "No," I whispered. "I don't want to live with you no more. Mama can go home to you. I told her she could, but I can't. I won't" (281). Glen attacks her and she tries to stab him with the butter knife she has been using to make sandwiches. Kicking and beating her he shouts, '*You goddam little bastard!*' emphasising yet again Bone's exilic status.

“‘I’ve prayed for you to die,” he hissed’. Glen continues to pound Bone’s head against the floor as he rapes her. “‘God!” I screamed with all the strength I had’ (285). Bone’s mother, Anney, appears when Bone regains consciousness and initially does the expected, “‘Come on, honey,” she cooed like I was a baby again. I’m gonna get you to a doctor”’ (287) but a little while later Anney utterly betrays her child by choosing Glen over Bone. ‘I could see her fingers on Glen’s shoulder, see the white knuckles holding him tight. My mouth closed over the shout I would not let go. Rage burned in my belly and came up in my throat. I said I could never hate her, but I hated her now for the way she held him, the way she stood there crying over him. Could she love me and still hold him like that?’(291)

In an interview with Carolyn Megan (1993), Dorothy Allison addresses the characterisation of the protagonist that perplexes students of self life writing and clarifies that even though aspects of Bone are based on Allison herself, the author is never simply casting her younger self in a leading role without actually fabricating the person she wants her to be on the page. The interview is especially enlightening as to Allison’s strategy for fictionalising her own experience in a book that is categorised as a novel:

CM: What did you learn through the process of writing the novel and through creating Bone?

DA: Well, Bone is a trick for me. I made her up very deliberately because I wanted to learn how to love young girls...how to love children. It’s hard to explain to people. My family was really loving and enormous, but there was a conviction about children in my family that’s very destructive and dangerous. I don’t think any of us believed in children. It’s a normal thing to backhand a child, to hit a child. That everyday brutality that was visited on the men and women in my family came out in the children... I made Bone so that I could see a child and believe her and inhabit her, live inside her. And the first thing I had to learn was how fragile children are. (7)

Having ‘made her up very deliberately’ does not necessarily render Bone any more or less autobiographical or fictive and what she experiences may or may not be directly

personal. Self life writing is creative writing, and ‘mediated through memory and language, “experience” is already an interpretation of the past and of our place in a culturally and historically specific present’ (Smith & Watson 2010 :33). Not only has Dorothy Allison given her protagonist a different name from her own, she has given her two names as if to magnify the distance from author to narrator to subject and suggest the novel’s fictional quality. ‘I’ve been called Bone all my life, but my name’s Ruth Anne’ (1). But first-person narration focuses attention right back on autobiography. Allison concludes her story ‘River of Names’ in *Trash* with an encounter where her lover ‘Jesse puts her hands behind my neck, smiles and says, “You tell the funniest stories.” ... “Yeah,” I tell her. “But I lie.”’ (19) Both Allison and Wicomb go to some lengths to problematise the generic undecidability of fictionalised self life writing. Allison uses first-person narration but asserts that her stories about family and her childhood are lies, while Wicomb deploys a first-person narrator in some stories and a third-person narrator in others, in ways which might be described as autobiography in the third person⁶⁰ or as a hybrid of fictionalised autobiography, yet refuses the category. With these disruptions and uncertainties in mind, I offer no resolution. The questions around self life writing are more interesting than any answer could be. The nomadism that is central to the self life writing of McCullers, Head, Wicomb and Allison is propelled by their exilic, liminal subjectivities. Lest this make them sound utterly alone or alienated, I offer their written work as evidence of the transversal, lateral connections they have their characters forge and that they, the authors themselves, establish with their readers.

⁶⁰ Phillippe Lejeune (1989) writes about ‘autobiography in the third person’ or ‘fictitious fiction’ whereby the author ascribes a fictitious name to the autobiographical ‘I’.

Chapter Two

The Outsider Within: Body and Exilic Consciousness

‘The body is our general medium for having a world’.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

‘[I]t may be time to ask whether essences can change and whether constructions can be normative’.

Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*

This chapter focuses on issues of body and representation from a feminist perspective and remains grounded in the experience of exile. It is through our physicality, the body’s sensory perceptions, that we come to know the world and our place in it. Before elaborating on the exilic dimension of the body, I will establish my position regarding the integrated entity that constitutes body/mind. My perspective is that we are flesh and blood and consciousness; a person is mind *and* body rather than an oppositional Cartesian mind-body binary. We are inextricably both mind and matter. Through much of western history, however, the body was seen as separate from rationality, as something from the natural world to be controlled by the mind or, if necessary, reined in by external social controls, that is, by other people and institutions. The female body in particular has long been viewed as a special case requiring the imposition of rationality from the outside. ‘Women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men’ (Grosz 14). Such enmeshment in corporeality was also attributed to colonised bodies and those attributed to the lower classes (McClintock 1995 :44, Alcoff 2006:103). Establishing control over undisciplined women, natives, certain ethnic groups, the poor, the mad and those who transgress social and sexual norms, has been a colonising exercise of power over the non-normative body by the hegemonic body politic.

My understanding of the body is similar to that of Linda Alcoff (2006) whose phenomenological account is deployed to explain those identity categories which are anchored in material bodily features. She calls these '*visible identities*'. Alcoff's approach integrates social identity categories with people's experiences of their own bodies, of themselves, and the bodies of others. Her focus is primarily on racial and gendered identities, and, I would add, a continuum of differently abled and aged bodies, since these are immediately observable external features which, due to cultural norms, shape the identities of the person whose body we are referring to and help to determine the reactions of others to those bodies. She makes clear the way in which bodily features are invested with a significance to which we immediately react. 'Both race and sex ... are most definitely physical, marked on and through the body, lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena and determinant of economic and political status' (Alcoff :102). It is due to the material reality of physical features and the immediacy of our perceptual response that the meanings attached to such features become naturalised. The fact that they are the product of learned modes of perception is not evident to us, for such perceptual practices have become habitual and are resistant to change (Lennon 2010). Alcoff points out how 'race and gender consciousness produce habitual bodily mannerisms that feel natural and become unconscious after long use' (108). Examples of different kinds of body consciousness are demonstrated by and towards the characters in work by Carson McCullers, some of whose characters are noticeably other because of their race, overt disabilities or their gender ambiguity; in Bessie Head because of gender, race and psychiatric involvement; in Dorothy Allison due to their abject status as poor whites, female victims of male violence, and marginalised lesbians; and in Zoë Wicomb since they are women and girls of mixed race in apartheid South Africa or immigrants or tourists

to Britain who look and sound as if they do not belong. In work by all four writers, examples of exilic body consciousness abound. Though these works depict a variety of responses to hegemonic attitudes, all indicate the significant influence of these attitudes.

Exile is fundamentally concerned with the lived experience of transnationalism--with transitions between rootedness and rootlessness, and between possession and dispossession; with deterritorialization and reterritorialization and with border crossings. Its ramifications are global, affecting entire cultures, and psychic, transforming the individual. Materially, exile is about the physical fact of the body at home and away, and is about the lived experience of the embodied individual who is originally from somewhere else. I will examine the variety of exilic elements of this corporeal female body actually emigrating from its physical, geographic place of origin and away from the imagined wider community or nation. My study also examines the metaphoric exile of not belonging within a particular 'home' community⁶¹, and the affective notion of feeling exiled from one's own body. Any one--or combination--of these iterations of exile may coexist simultaneously in an individual and are manifested in the lives and reflected in the work of my chosen authors. The kinds of alienation that accompany exile as I analyse it are, from the broadest to the narrowest: exile from the nation, exile from the community, exile from the family and a kind of intrabody exile within the self. It is this last category that will bring me, in Chapter Three, to a discussion of identity as a process of

⁶¹ Minnie Bruce Pratt writes of being homesick while at home in 'Identity: Skin Blood Heart' (1988). In her autobiographical narrative, Pratt problematises home, and this is crucial to an examination of the link between place, particularly home, and identity in my chosen authors' work. Some feminists raise questions about home as a metaphor for identity. Teresa de Lauretis, on the one hand, urges women to acknowledge that home is not always safe, and is often a repressive and exclusionary place, and to affirm our displacement from home, as 'eccentric subjects' (1990), while Iris Marion Young argues that there are aspects of the ideal home that we should reclaim (1997). I am most inclined to agree with the perspectives of Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty (2004), who in their critique of Pratt's essay,

becoming that is always dynamic, never fixed. It must be acknowledged here that it is extremely difficult to separate out aspects of body, exile and identity for the purposes of discussing them in self-contained chapters. These aspects of the self are inextricably linked and therefore overlap both in the lived experience and in my analysis of the writers' craft in this thesis. The twisting and doubling back necessitated by the way in which body, exile and identity are actually intertwined mimics the rhizomatic turns described in Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjects. Whilst under certain circumstances an exilic consciousness can be interpreted as a form of alienation or marginalisation, it is important to bear in mind that exile can also play out as liberation.

Judith Butler begins her book *Undoing Gender* with this challenge to our thinking, 'What makes for a livable world is no idle question' (Butler 2004:17). With this invitation to consider both ethics and physical circumstances, Butler has the reader interrogate the fate of the individual human being in the larger community, a person's autonomy, their access to the means of survival and their rights. Only after certain conditions have been met can there be any possibility of 'a livable world'. Although Butler's point of entry into the conversation is from the perspective of gender, she addresses the demand for a theory of embodiment that could take account 'not simply of sexual difference but of racial difference, class difference and differences due to disability' (Price and Shildrick 1999: 5). Using the physical body as her starting point, she leads into some of the major themes of my proposed analysis:

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agent and instrument of all these as well, or the site where "doing" and "being done to" become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its

suggest the possibility of a productive tension between home and not home, identity and nonidentity, safety and risk.

invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own (2004: 21).

It is useful to keep in mind the notion of the individual ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ as it affects the characters in the literature analysed in this study. Carson McCullers creates multi-dimensional characters whose bodies mark them as other. Emphasising their otherness invites further interrogation of the ways in which McCullers raises the notion of the public and private dimensions of the self, with body as origin. Later in this chapter I will explore characters as embodied figurations in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and *The Member of the Wedding* (1946).

After the section analysing McCullers’s characters, I introduce the Masarwa teacher, Margaret in Bessie Head’s novel *Maru* (1971) and then Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* (1973). Both characters are exilic in that they look other and behave differently from the locals in the communities to which they have moved. While Margaret’s story in *Maru* is one of a bravely nomadic character, Elizabeth’s in the later novel is more overtly a tragedy. Elizabeth is an exiled coloured South African woman living in Motabeng, Botswana, where she is one of the few racial outsiders in the small Batswana community. Initially, it is bodily difference that marks Elizabeth--her gender and her mixed race. Her behaviour, however, underscores her otherness as she is subject to excruciating manifestations of severe mental illness. As the title suggests, power shifts in the novel as she alternates between perceiving herself as a victim of the characters Dan and Sello (‘being done to’) and as agent or doer.

Following the examination of body in *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, I investigate Dorothy Allison’s narrator in the story ‘A Lesbian Appetite’ (1988; 2002) and Frieda Shenton in Zoë Wicomb’s short story “You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town” (1987) to show that body and agency are crucial to their characterisation. In view of

the sociocultural dimensions of the literature, the interplay of the individual character with the larger society is through the body or the written representation of the body. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler contends that gender is a social construction rather than an inborn condition; it is an act of becoming, rather than a fixed fact. It is my view, however, that while gender is for the most part socially constructed, it is superimposed over the biological given of sex. The character, Frieda, in Zoë Wicomb's 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town' is a young, pregnant woman, and the fact of her pregnancy is an incontrovertible aspect of her sex. Similarly, that Frieda is a young woman of mixed race is a biological fact. As critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw points out, we should resist the divisions that separate categories like race and gender because people inhabit multiple categories simultaneously. Our performance of race, gender and class is the result of what Crenshaw terms 'intersectionality' and it plays out in a combination of biology and culture. Wicomb's protagonist, Frieda, is--depending upon where she is (in terms of time, space, and in her life) at the time--any or all of the following: the university student, the coloured girl among Cape coloureds in her community, the lover of a white man, the single pregnant young woman having an illegal abortion, the disillusioned, self-aware individual who makes her own decisions.

For Dorothy Allison, the physical body and discursively produced lesbian subjects are at the centre of her story 'A Lesbian Appetite' in the collection *Trash*. Allison's stories, and this one in particular, offer a unique space for looking at an embodied and affective notion of personhood. Smell, taste and touch powerfully evoke memories and associations. The combination of sensation and cognition provide the opening to examine embodied subjectivities as constitutive, integrated parts of a whole person. Since Allison's stories move back and forth between genres--

fiction and autobiography and fictionalised autobiography—it is tempting to assume that the whole person, the first person narrator in ‘A Lesbian Appetite’ is a creative literary representation based on Dorothy Allison, the author.

What do I mean here by the ‘whole person’? I approach the topic of characterisation in this chapter with pairs of terms that are not necessarily always polarities or binary opposites, rather two aspects of states in tension, in process, imagined on a continuum: self/other; origin/exile; home/away; masculine/feminine; native/stranger; child/adult; sanity/insanity. These pairs of factors are not mutually exclusive; they are productive and promising because of the tensions between them, rather than because of any extremes of essentialism inherent in them. These and other facets of the embodied self in search of aspects of its own elusive identity figure prominently in work by McCullers, Head, Allison and Wicomb. A rhizomatic, nomadic thought process informs this approach.

Grotesque Bodies in Carson McCullers

Most of the literary characters I analyse are categorised female. But I am also interested in masculine characterisation by which I mean biological, chromosomal maleness. Like women, men and male characters embody multiple subjectivities. Numerous rich examples can be found among Carson McCullers’s male characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The obese, childlike, mentally handicapped Antonapoulos and the seemingly wise partner who loves him absolutely, the mute John Singer, are drawn in complex ways that underscore their exilic embodied consciousness. In the same novel, the female subject, Mick Kelly, is a boyish girl whose characterisation suggests that McCullers believes that there is a kind of gender spectrum and she is troubling the gender binary. She also proffers the notion of a flexible sexuality rather than the polarities of either heterosexuality or homosexuality.

The author grew up during an era when it would have been unusual to have interacted on a regular basis with people with disabilities. Most would have been institutionalised or living in segregated, supervised group homes (Baynton 2001). A similar kind of segregation operated based on race and this would have been linked also to economic class. In various ways, black people in the Jim Crow south were deprived of opportunities that would have allowed greater social mobility, so they would have lived on the poor side of town in a black neighbourhood. Dr. Copeland is the one notable exception since he is very well educated but is still constrained by his race as to where he might live. Homosexual behaviour would almost always have been closeted. Social categories regarding race, class, disability and sexuality in the south in the 1930s and 1940s were rigidly adhered to. McCullers, ahead of her time, acknowledges the borders and crosses them nomadically. Her writing is a form of resistance to hegemonic attitudes that seek to constrain bodies.

What one sees of the observable physical body of the fictional character as described by the author may yield unexpected reactions from the other characters. They may accord him or her attributes based on their needs. People respond first to the body of the other, and then to his or her demeanour by inventing their own narratives about that person. John Singer sees transcendent facets of Antonapoulos that probably do not exist to others. Numerous characters believe that Singer has a special rapport with just themselves and that he understands their unique predicaments, even though he only listens and communicates non-verbally, if at all. His silence enables them to make Singer who they want him to be. A peculiar loneliness haunts the characters who are marked as other because of something unusual about them, physically and/or spiritually. They look different because they are different--their bodily otherness underscores that they are psychically unlike other people--which begs the question:

who/what *is* normal? If there is no such thing then McCullers is suggesting that freakishness has its place on the spectrum of the norm.

While I refuse the binaries normal/abnormal, I am compelled to accept those of birth/death as they represent the beginning and the end of the living body. McCullers characterises her misfits ‘in an extended context; there is plenty of time for everything’ (Louis D. Rubin in Clark & Friedman 1996: 123). In this space, there is ‘the sense of a brooding loneliness in a place saturated with time’ (Rubin qtd in Clark & Friedman: 123). A certain southern unhurriedness allows for characterisation to unfold as a process that begins with the body and ends with mortality. What transpires for a McCullers character between those two points, birth and death, constitutes a kind of reaching into the void in hopes of making a connection with another human being thus infusing meaning into life.

The theme of loneliness is highlighted in most critical essays (Clark & Friedman) on the novel. Critics generally concur with what Gayatri Spivak points out as ‘[o]ne of the chief concerns of McCullers’s first book, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), is that people cannot discover a common bond’ (Spivak qtd in Clark & Friedman : 131). McCullers offers no lasting solution to the problem of existential loneliness, but does reveal glimpses of just how desperate her characters are for human connection. An unexpected and even bizarre pairing is evident in the homosexual love relationship between Singer and Antonapoulos. It seems an asymmetrical association in various ways—Singer actively gives and loves, Antonapoulos passively takes, consumes—but each is sustained by the dynamics of caring for the few pages that they are actually together before Antonapoulos is sent to an insane asylum, and by the ten years of being together prior to that. In terms of their bodily appearances, Singer presents as cerebral and ascetic, while Antonapoulos is

portrayed as slow-witted and gluttonous. Neither man speaks. As Spivak points out, it is ironically not the 'transcendental androgynous model that stands as the book's god, but rather the male homosexual as the institutionalized insane' (136). McCullers turns on its head the literary myth of the ideal, worshipped beloved who is the apotheosis of physical perfection.

The novel begins, 'In town there were two mutes and they were always together' (1) and tragically, soon after, Antonapolous is taken away without his friend knowing 'just what he really understood'. They are wrenched apart. Singer writes elaborate letters to his friend but never sends them as Antonapolous cannot read. Antonapolous's mutism, homosexuality and mental handicap would ordinarily so marginalise and silence him as to foreclose any opportunity for love other than that of the unconditional love of a mother, yet McCullers disrupts expectations and creates what Spivak reads as a 'love legend *in extremis* ...a commentary on the ideology of "normal love" that is the sustaining glory of literature' (135). Singer idolises his beloved. When he goes to visit him at the asylum's infirmary laden with gifts, the omniscient narrator reveals how Singer sees the 'child-idiot-idol'⁶² before him:

Antonapolous! ... He wore a scarlet dressing-gown and green silk pajamas and a turquoise ring ... When Singer stood before him he smiled serenely, without surprise, and held out his jeweled hand ... His head was immense against the white pillow. The placid composure of his face was so profound that he seemed hardly aware that Singer was with him ... his fat little feet had untucked the cover at the bottom of the bed. His smile faded and he kicked contemptuously at the blanket... When [the nurse] had straightened the bed to his liking the big Greek inclined his head so deliberately that the gesture seemed one of benediction rather than a simple nod of thanks ... Antonapolous watched [Singer] with his dark, drowsy eyes. Sitting motionless in his bright, rich garments like some wise king from a legend. (219, 221, 223)

When Singer returns to visit Antonapolous six months later and finds that he has died, he is devastated. He goes up to his hotel room and packs his suitcase and the many

gifts and treats he had brought for his friend. His train would not be departing the town 'until nine in the evening and he had the empty afternoon before him' (324) so he wanders aimlessly. His grief is physical, '[h]is throat felt swollen and he wanted to swallow but was unable to do so ... He looked no one full in the face and his head drooped down to one side like a sick animal's' (324). McCullers makes plain her sense of the interconnectedness of body/mind and the alienation experienced in the absence of love and community. For Singer there was only Antonapolous and now he is dead. The loss of the beloved renders Singer's life meaningless. He arrives back in his town. 'He returned to his room with swollen eyes and an aching head. After resting he drank a glass of iced coffee and smoked a cigarette. Then when he had washed the ashtray and the glass he brought out a pistol from his pocket and put a bullet in his chest' (326). He could not see the purpose in persisting as his own embodied self, embedded within his environment, forever bereft of the one person with whom he had a real connection. His exile is permanent and absolute; it is death.

Feminist critical literature emphasises *that there is a range of available philosophical theories* to make sense of the embodied self. It is useful to read and consider theories of materiality, performativity, phenomenology, psychology and more to find amenable strategies that help make embodied subjectivity become intelligible. As the character of Mick Kelly unfolds in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, her materiality, that is her gendered corporeality, broadcasts one message—she is a girl, while her behaviour and manner of dress suggest masculine performativity. She maintains this nomadic balance until she succumbs to sexist social and economic pressures and curbs her boyishness.

⁶² This is Spivak's term for Antonapolous.

Mick shares a bedroom with her older sisters, Etta and Hazel, who primp and talk about movie stars, pursuits that Mick ridicules. She has the sense that she is superior to them and is destined for something special in life. Her love of music and the escape it provides is an example of a liberatory aspect to her exilic consciousness, but this creative outlet is doomed. Earlier in the novel, when she is twelve and thirteen years old, she is self-assured and not yet disillusioned. She notices yet refuses the limitations that gender and socioeconomic factors would impose on her. In other words, for much of the book, Mick hopes that she might find ways around having her life reach a dead end because she is a girl. However, in conversation with her friend Harry Minowitz, a high school senior who has a part-time job, Mick acknowledges the unfairness of gender discrimination and its direct effect on her life. Her parents' home is a low rent boarding house, her father hardly works at all, and the family struggles to make ends meet:

‘One thing I’ve thought about,’ Mick said. ‘A boy has a better advantage like that than a girl. I mean a boy can usually get some part-time job that don’t take him out of school and leaves him time for other things. But there’s no jobs like that for girls. When a girl wants a job she has to quit school and work full time. I’d sure like to earn a couple of bucks a week like you do, but there’s just not any way.’ (246)

The inflexibility of these social rules creep deeper into her consciousness as the book goes on. Mick is quite nomadic for the first two thirds of the three part novel, but as she gets older, she understands that in order to live in her world as a young woman, she has to rein herself in. She devolves from running around town wearing boy’s shorts, free to dream about a future in which she makes music, to working long days as a shop assistant in the costume jewellery department of the dime store, wearing stockings and uncomfortable heels which limit her mobility. Her physical and social/economic mobility are constrained.

In her 1985 book, in a chapter entitled ‘Tomboys and Revolting Femininity’, Louise Westling asserts that ‘in fact, Mick’s sense of romantic heroism is entirely masculine’ (116). Her fantasy is to become a composer and as there are no existing female role models in this position, she comes up with an elaborate masculine *and* feminine vision of herself in the future:

Later on – when she was twenty – she would be a great world-famous composer. She would have a whole symphony orchestra and conduct all of her music herself. She would stand up on the platform in front of the big crowds of people. To conduct the orchestra she would wear either a real man’s evening suit or else a red dress spangled with rhinestones. (240 - 241)

This is the same Mick whom Biff Brannon describes standing at the entrance to his New York Cafe early in the novel: ‘[a] gangling, towheaded youngster, a girl of about twelve, stood looking in the doorway. She was dressed in khaki shorts, a blue shirt, and tennis shoes—so that at first glance she was like a very young boy’ (18). How she dresses is significant to how she performs her embodied subjectivity, and with the exception of the occasional, somewhat awkward experimentation with hyperfeminine dresses, heels and makeup, tending towards boyish clothes and affect seem natural to Mick. Through the course of the novel, however, she starts to realise that as she approaches womanhood she will be forced to abandon the freedom and possibilities of a masculine-leaning identity for the constraints of the culturally imposed femininity of the small town late 1930s south. She assumes the strictures for herself as she comes to understand what is and is not deemed acceptable. One of her greatest sacrifices is having to give up music.

Mick is so moved by what music evokes for her that she calls both the music and the emotional experience of it her ‘inside room’. On warm nights she hides in the shrubs outside neighbours’ windows to listen to classical music radio stations. One night she hears Beethoven’s *Eroica* playing and her response is overwhelmingly

emotional and physical. Louise Westling calls her reaction ‘ecstasy and terrible pain. To alleviate this pain she resorts to a typically female kind of masochism, turning her frustration back upon herself’ (1985: 116):

Suddenly Mick began hitting her thigh with her fist. She pounded the same muscle with all her strength until the tears came down her face. But she could not feel this hard enough. The rocks under the bush were sharp. She grabbed a handful of them and began scraping them up and down on the same spot until her hand was bloody. Then she fell back to the ground and lay looking up at the night. With the fiery hurt in her leg she felt better. (119)

She experiences her love of music in her ‘inside room’ because it is a private, guilty pleasure that her family would view as impractical. After Mick takes the soul-destroying job at the dime store, leaving school at the age of fourteen, ‘no music was in her mind. That was a funny thing. It was like she was shut out from the inside room ... A very hard thing to understand’ (353). This analogy perfectly describes the state of her exilic consciousness. The last the reader knows of Mick is that she feels angry and cheated because she is imprisoned by the expectations of others. Both her identity, the self in the context of social interaction, and her subjectivity, that which provides the condition for selfhood, seem to have been forcibly warped because of the fact of her female body. She is trying to convince herself not to give up on the ‘inside room’ entirely when she expresses the hope that ‘[m]aybe she would get a chance soon’. She attempts to wrest something of value from her childhood and its boyish freedom⁶³, ‘[e]lse what the hell good had it all been – the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense ... All right! O.K.! Some good’ (354).

The Member of the Wedding

Both Mick in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding* are girls going through the changes of body and consciousness associated with growing out of childhood and into adulthood. Frankie--Frances Jasmine Addams--is twelve years old at the beginning of McCullers's novel, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), and a quite different person at thirteen by the end of the book. She is chronologically, physically and psychically on the threshold of a new and different phase in her life. McCullers creates a productive tension between mandatory sociocultural mores in the deep South during the time period of the Second World War and Frankie's own desires. This passageway of liminality is marked by anxiety and alienation as well as growth and transformation as she reluctantly submits to an extent, but never entirely, to the white, southern, middle class ideal of womanhood. Frankie is torn between her nomadic tendencies as a subversive character and her fear of ostracism if she yields to this impulse for nonconformity; above all, she wants to be a member of something, and, as the novel progresses, she comes to realise that in her world, one cannot be both other and a member.

The novel is divided into three parts; in each part, the protagonist in metamorphosis labels herself quite deliberately as if the choice of name and the identity it seeks to signify point to a fixed and unified person. She announces the role she will perform in each part by the name she is called by the third person narrator: in Part One, she is Frankie, the truly nomadic, gender-role defying tomboy; in Part Two she is F. Jasmine, a dreamy, philosophical girl consciously shedding her old tomboyish ways and trying on adulthood; by Part Three, she is Frances, a teenager who no longer resists normative strictures the way she used to and is now

⁶³ Louise Westling refers to the way in which Mick 'renounces childhood and its boyish freedom' (118).

performatively rehearsing herself as becoming-woman, even while rogue desires tug at her. Carson McCullers uses the novel form because its length allows her the space to fully address the nuances of her protagonist's identity formation.

Frankie's liminality is both literal and metaphorical. She may be the fictional manifestation of what Braidotti refers to in her explanation of the 'Deleuzian becoming [which] is the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favour of a flux of multiple becoming' (1994: 111). The novel opens with the clear picture of a character who is in-between; McCullers's narrator immediately draws Frankie as a boyish girl, an intellectually precocious child, an outsider within 'who hung around doorways', actual, literal thresholds between one room and another or between the outside and the inside of a physical space.

It happened that green and crazy summer when Frankie was twelve years old. This was the summer when for a long time she had not been a member. She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world. Frankie had become an unjoined person who hung around in doorways, and she was afraid. (461)

Standing in a doorway, one is neither here nor there, an apt analogy for Frankie. She does not fit the hyperfeminised model of the southern belle, nor, as the Frankie at the beginning of Part One does she seem to want to. The stereotype of the ideal southern woman during this time embodies the opposite of the male in the male-female binary; while a man can be unconstrained, vocal, strong, take-charge, and masculine, a woman must be small, contained, restrained, quiet, pretty, feminine and subservient. The reader is led to believe that Frankie may not previously have questioned the extent to which she does not fit these categories. She seems to have been quite comfortable in her own tomboyish skin. Until the announcement of her older brother Jarvis's engagement to Janice, she may not have cared much about forcing herself to conform to a predetermined formula for female appearance and behaviour. That Janice

is petite and feminine and seems to belong firmly in one particular, socially acceptable category is especially unsettling to Frankie at this stage of her life. An exilic consciousness begins to emerge in Frankie as she notices the dissociation between who she has been and who she is expected to become. The first stirrings of this consciousness come with the exile from her own body, soon followed by a kind of nomadic exile from her community. She will have to negotiate the pressures and conflicting tensions and decide how to proceed. This summer is a time of the convergence of powerful pressures on Frankie to tame herself if she ever wants to belong, if she ever wants to acquire membership. Her body is beginning to change and, as if one's thirteenth birthday signifies the moment at which one must start to conform, she begins to wrestle with who she is. The message Frankie reads in various places is that she must alter her identity now that she is almost thirteen years old. Until the spring, she had slept with her father, a widower, in the same bed, but the end of that practice signalled the start of many changes.

One night in April, when she and her father were going to bed, he looked at her and said, all of a sudden: 'Who is this great big long-legged twelve-year-old blunderbuss who still wants to sleep with her old Papa.' And she was too big to sleep with her father any more. She had to sleep in her upstairs room alone. (481)

Submitting to society's requirements of her as a young woman is profoundly unsettling; Frankie becomes fearful and lonely as she slowly relinquishes the child she used to be. She spends most of the summer with her six-year-old cousin, John Henry, and the black family cook, Berenice. Frankie invites John Henry to spend the night fairly often, ostensibly because she thinks he may be frightened or lonely, but really because she is. She seems to grasp that she is the fearful one, but, perhaps not that the fear has to do with feeling forced to let go of those things and practices by which she defined herself until this strange and frightening time. She scrutinises herself in the mirror.

This summer she was grown so tall that she was almost a big freak, and her shoulders were narrow, her legs too long. She wore a pair of blue track shorts, a B.V.D. undervest, and she was barefooted. Her hair had been cut like a boy's, but it had not been cut for a long time and was now not even parted. The reflection in the glass was warped and crooked, but Frankie knew well what she looked like; she drew up her left shoulder and turned her head aside. (462)

In early adolescence, feelings of gender ambiguity that may have been long present and quite comfortable to the individual throughout childhood can become confusing and frightening. At this stage of her development, Frankie has two choices: to continue on as a tomboy and, ultimately, to reject heterosexism risking--possibly even inviting--the catastrophe of being cast out of society; or to sublimate her natural tendencies and consciously remake herself in the socially acceptable mould of the female southern teenager. An exilic consciousness informs all possible outcomes. If she exercises agency, she can choose to go into exile; if she stays in her home town and is not compliant, she may be banished into social exile. If she does neither, and forces herself to conform, she will exile herself from herself.

In Part One of the novel, McCullers emphasises Frankie's liminality by echoing it in the setting and atmosphere. Frankie feels the twilight in-betweenness and the dread evoked by being neither in one firm place or another, just like the indeterminate time between day and night. The as yet unanswered question hovers above her: will I be an insider or an outsider, or forever on the threshold?

It was not yet night. Houses along the street were dark, lights showed in the windows. Darkness had gathered in the thick-leaved trees and shapes in the distance were ragged and gray. But the night was not yet in the sky.

'I think something is wrong,' she said. 'It is too quiet. I have a peculiar warning in my bones. I bet you a hundred dollars it's going to storm.' (498)

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1988) describes the back and forth identity border crossing in such a way as to perfectly capture Frankie's experience:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. As Part One comes to a close, Frankie has a significant but fleeting

realisation; in this moment, she knows who she is. She believes she understands how to approach her life now that her brother and his girlfriend, Jarvis and Janice are going to be married at Winter Hill next Sunday. Frankie has designed a complicated and impossible solution to her problem of otherness and alienation; she decides that she will go off with the bride and groom: 'At last she knew just who she was and where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together. And finally, after the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid' (501). This way, she does not have to choose to be a bride or a groom; she can be herself. Of course this is an untenable plan.

Part Two is set over the course of one full day; it is the day before the wedding. Frankie's name change to F. Jasmine indicates a symbolic processual shift in her sense of her identity. The process has to do with her consciously transforming herself and exercising agency; she is enacting a variation of the nomadism that Braidotti writes about: 'Nomadic shifts designate therefore a creative sort of becoming; a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise

unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge' (1994: 6). Certainly, the 'old' Frankie of Part One is connected to the 'new' F. Jasmine of Part Two and there is no clean break between her previous and current identities, rather identity and experience are layered one over the other all the time. If name and identity are linked, and form some approximation of signifier and signified, then Frankie uses this most obvious starting point as a way to initiate and drive change in the direction she thinks she wants at this time. By minimising Frankie or Frances down to its first initial, 'F', she is attempting to control and reduce the unacceptably masculine part of her nature. In addition, having fallen in love with the idea of the wedding, she now emphasizes her middle name, which starts with a 'J' just like the bride and groom's do; the three of them are now connected by their same first initials and the members of the wedding are Jasmine, Janice and Jarvis. Not only does she no longer feel fear or loneliness, 'Because of the wedding, F. Jasmine felt connected with all she saw, and it was as a sudden member that on this Saturday, she went around the town' (502). The image of Frankie wandering the streets of her town evoke Iris Marion Young's reference to the city as a metaphor for identity. The various neighbourhoods with their distinct characteristics are not separated by physical borders, one does not suddenly end where another begins. So it is with Frankie's identity; as she meanders physically in the material world, her conscious and subconscious identifications with particular qualities and ideas gradually change, despite having identified herself as 'a sudden member'.

In order to prepare to perform her new self, Frankie addresses the external first--her clothes, best imagined as her costume for the debut

performance. The shift is announced by her decision to '[turn] to other things'. The reader glimpses her as '[s]he sat at her desk wearing only the blue-and-white striped trousers of her pajamas which were rolled up above the knees' (503) Before taking off her boy's pyjamas and putting on a dress, she solidifies her self by writing her new name, as if to inform both herself and others of her new identity through the process of forming the letters: 'she decided to make herself some visiting cards with *Miss F. Jasmine Addams, Esq.*, engraved with squinted letters... She dressed carefully that morning in her most grown and best, the pink organdie, and put on lipstick and Sweet Serenade' (503). The contrast between the shirtless tomboy and the painted, perfumed young woman is so extreme as to suggest caricature or drag.

As she walks around the town--a nomad because of her gender subversiveness as well as a traveller--Frankie, now F. Jasmine, notices the places that 'the old Frankie' used to visit. Seeing herself as grown up now, she observes the packing case lemonade stand with the sign reading DEW DROP INN, acknowledging 'that she would never run it anymore'(506). Wearing her pink dress on this transformative day, she walks down Front Avenue which 'was not a fine street, but nevertheless the old Frankie liked to come here now and then at certain times' with bare feet, wearing khaki shorts and a Mexican hat (509). She recalls how jealous the barefoot tomboy Frankie had been of the soldiers who 'went around in glad, loud gangs together, or walked the sidewalks with grown girls...[s]he imagined the many cities that these soldiers came from, and thought of the countries where they would go--while she was stuck there in the town forever'. (509) She envied them the fact that they were members of something, that they were in the process of coming from

somewhere en route to somewhere else, and, perhaps, their maleness and the freedom it affords them. Now, however, there is no jealousy as she begins to build out of words and ideas the path that she intends to follow to obtain agency. She feels herself becoming transformed, feeling free and experiencing 'a new unnameable connection' to every person she encounters in town. (507).

As F. Jasmine the feminine young woman, she walks into the Blue Moon, a bar and cafe on Front Avenue, for the first time. A crucial part of her performance in the Blue Moon and elsewhere around town is what she refers to as 'the telling of the wedding' (513). As she hears herself talking about the wedding to strangers, at first quite awkwardly, and after some repetition, more confidently, she is simultaneously seeking to act upon the connection she feels with strangers and to fix the discursive construction of the identity she is choosing. Judith Butler might view the telling as a performative act, while J.L. Austin (1962: 108) would call it a perlocutionary act which is 'what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading', in this case, attempting to achieve the desired outcome of the 'truth' of one's identity and the 'reality' of future possibilities. Frankie is driven on this day 'only to be recognized for her true self. It was a need so strong, this want to be known and recognized, that F. Jasmine forgot the wild hard glare and choking dust and miles (it must have been at least five miles) of wandering all over town' (513).

As she walks, she tries to fathom this strange, new phase in her life. Instead of allowing herself to become overwhelmed by powerlessness or meaninglessness, she invests everything with meaning as a strategy by which to cope with the unfathomable question: how to live. At first glance, her choice

to imbue the day and everything in it with special meaning is an empowering act. A second look may make it seem desperate. Either way, she is actively searching out clues that might light her path. Frankie realizes that the number three is somehow significant. She thinks of a time 'when the JA three of them would be together in all the many distant places' (513), Jarvis, Janice and F. Jasmine Addams, all members of the wedding. The three parts of the novel echo Frankie's awareness of the three parts of the chronological continuum: past, present, future, each phase representative of an aspect of her unfolding identity and underscored by her exilic consciousness. She works to superimpose a form on the chaos of impending adulthood and 'the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song' (514). It becomes a structured narrative, yet oddly she mentions the end before the beginning. Uncertainty about the outcome may nudge her towards considering the end first.

As she wanders around town, the narrator has her pay attention to brick houses with flower-bordered sidewalks in the upper middle class neighbourhood as well as 'two-room shacks and rotted privies' in the poorest area (515). In addition to being a self-involved twelve year old experiencing a kind of identity crisis, she is also intellectually precocious and socially aware, noticing discrepancies in the material circumstances of poor people and blacks. She looks inward and outward. While walking, she hears Berenice's voice in her head, a combination of Frankie's own conscience and her self-awareness or standpoint. An entire parenthetical paragraph is devoted to Berenice's voice 'heard but unnoticed'. Frankie the nomad will not heed the voice that admonishes her for 'roam[ing] around...taking up with total strangers' (515).

Although she feels pushed and pulled by expectations, her strength of character, stubbornness perhaps, persists. She pushes back against some of the restrictive norms by going where she pleases and ‘taking up with total strangers’ when she wants to. She is inconsistently subversive in this part of the novel and this inconsistency fits with the performative nature of her experimentation with becoming as opposed to being. Her behaviour and identifications swing pendulum-like between conformity and non-conformity, childhood and adulthood, insider and outsider status, expressions of femininity and masculinity.

As a childish tomboy, Frankie had loved seeing the monkey and the organ grinder in town. On her magical expedition the morning before the wedding, the two incarnations of the same character, Frankie past and present, converge, ‘The old Frankie had always loved the monkey and the monkey-man...[and] now F. Jasmine was eager to see them’ (518). After a startling incident in which the monkey jumps onto Frankie’s shoulder for a moment, she recognises a red-haired soldier she had seen earlier drinking in the Blue Moon, the bar downstairs with its seedy hotel above. How he looks at Frankie transforms her into the desirable young woman she thought she would try and be that day. His gaze changes her: ‘He was looking at F. Jasmine from the top of her head, down the organdie best dress, and to the black pumps she was wearing’ (520). He invites her to walk with him and she is physically uncomfortable trying to match her stride with his and socially ill-at-ease attempting to find ways for their conversation to intersect. It is surprising and unsettling for the reader to grasp, as it must be for Frankie herself, the extent to which Frankie simply cannot find the right thing to say. When she is talking to

Berenice at the kitchen table, the conversation flows freely and they move easily from topic to topic. Frankie is usually full of interesting ideas and is quite loquacious. Now, however, with the soldier, language as a form of communication malfunctions for her. 'For several minutes he did not talk. Then, when at last he spoke, the words did not make sense to her and she did not understand' (523).

The irony is plain to the reader: the soldier either does not know or does not care that Frankie is only twelve years old and he is interested only in sex. Frankie, not knowing much about sex per se, but having a vague sense about heterosexual courtship rituals, is trying on normative adult womanhood. To a certain extent, she is dressing and behaving as if she wants this kind of attention because she is supposed to want it, yet she is also terrified of it, not necessarily through prudishness or frigidity but because the possibility of compulsory heterosexuality could be a claustrophobic prison for her.

She realized for the first time that she was walking with a soldier, with one of the groups of loud, glad gangs that roamed around the streets together or walked with the grown girls ... But she was not altogether proud. There was an uneasy doubt that she could not quite place or name. (521)

The cause of her unease is complex; she is anxious about the normative sex and gender role expectations that come with being a young woman in the south at that time, and conscious of her discomfort around those expectations. She is forcing herself to try out a role that does not suit her. They walk back to the Blue Moon, which the soldier refers to as 'a kind of hotel' and he buys Frankie a beer which she drinks, even though she does not like the taste. McCullers has established Frankie as a headstrong character who is rarely coerced into doing something she would rather not. In this instance, she briefly acts out the stereotype of the submissive adolescent female wanting to please a potential

male suitor even to her own detriment. But she soon acknowledges her own, authentically nomadic instincts. She reclaims her agency and prepares to go about her business without the soldier. The unfamiliar effects of the alcohol and her wariness about the situation make her want to leave: 'The hot, close smell in the hotel suddenly made her feel a little queer' (525). Mc Cullers uses the word 'queer' numerous times throughout this novel, often to signpost a character's being ill at ease with his/her gender or a sexually strange circumstance. Frankie thanks the soldier for treating her to the beer and as she gets up to leave, 'the soldier reached out toward her and caught a piece of her dress', asking for 'a date for nine o'clock' (525). Caught off guard by his aggression and her ambivalent feelings about being seen as a grown up girl while actually still a child, she agrees and leaves to go shopping for a dress to wear to the wedding. She is doubly vulnerable in a patriarchal society, as a child and as a female. Returning to her plan to be a member of the wedding offers her a strange sort of refuge.

When Frankie arrives home, she spends much of the afternoon arguing with Berenice about not coming back after the wedding the next day and going off with the bride and groom. She is compelled to imagine her own identity formation as an actual journey; she needs to leave home in order to find out who she is meant to be. She may have an inkling--though not the vocabulary to express it--that going away is a nomadic and exilic necessity to the process of becoming, but she is too young to undertake such an adventure on her own, so she creates her own solution to the problem; she will go away with the bridal couple. Berenice explains the heteronormative, procreative pattern: 'Two is company and three is a crowd. And that is the main thing about a wedding...'

(529). She goes on to remind Frankie of Noah's ark. "'Two by two,'" said Berenice. "He admitted them creatures two by two". Later, while Berenice, Frankie and John Henry eat a late afternoon meal at the kitchen table 'they began to talk of love. It was a subject F. Jasmine had never talked about in all her life' (531). To introduce her vast and atypical knowledge of the topic, Berenice says, "'I have heard of many a queer thing ... I have knew womens to love veritable Satans and thank Jesus ... I have knew boys to take it into their heads to fall in love with other boys. You know Lily Mae Jenkins?'" When Frankie hesitates, Berenice describes a stereotypical effeminate homosexual who "'prisses around with a pink satin blouse and one arm akimbo. Now this Lily Mae fell in love with a man name Juney Jones. A man, mind you. And Lily Mae turned into a girl. He changed his nature and his sex and turned into a girl'" (532). Frankie is especially intrigued with this because of her own ambiguity about rigidly-defined sex and gender designations. Later in the novel she remembers when she was the old, nomadic, border-crossing Frankie she had fantasized about adding her own creative touches to the way the world worked: 'She planned it so that people could instantly change back and forth from boys to girls, whichever way they felt like and wanted' (547). In Part Two of the novel, Frankie is coming to understand that the changes required of her have nothing to do with what she 'felt like and wanted'.

Berenice coaches her in the ways she ought to change herself in order to be more feminine to fit into the acceptable social slot where a white teenage girl 'belongs'. As F. Jasmine the becoming-woman seeking approval, she says, 'I'm not rough and greedy any more. I already changed that way' (533), but this change is a struggle for her. She models for Berenice the orange satin

evening dress and silver shoes she bought for the wedding. The effect is so peculiar that Berenice says, 'You had all your hair shaved off like a convict, and now you tie a silver ribbon around this head without any hair... Here you got on this grown woman's evening dress. Orange satin. And that brown crust on your elbows. The two things just don't mix' (540). Frankie attempts to perform the transformation of herself to comply with culturally sanctioned femininity, but the change feels forced and uncomfortable. Again, as with the pink organdie dress earlier, her performance evokes masquerade or the drag artist. Berenice's description of Frankie in the wedding dress recalls Frankie's tales of the Crazy-House at the fair where she is alternately fascinated and repelled by the freaks in the freak show booths.

In the last hours of the last evening before the wedding, Frankie goes back to the Blue Moon to find the red haired soldier for their 'date'. He invites her upstairs. 'F. Jasmine did not want to go upstairs, but she did not know how to refuse' (581). The Frankie of Part One acts out against normative behaviour expectations that do not suit her. F. Jasmine, however, is strangely compliant in the manner of the stereotypical young woman who is obedient to a domineering man. She follows him up two flights of stairs '[b]ut every footstep F. Jasmine took, she felt somehow was wrong' (582). Once they arrive in the soldier's room, McCullers repeats the words 'silence' or 'silent' eight times in three short paragraphs to emphasize anxiety and voicelessness. The narrator explains that the silence 'was the forewarning hush that comes before an unknown trouble' (583). The heightened awareness of both quiet and time intensify the mounting tension. For the soldier the tension is straightforwardly sexual, for Frankie it is fear of the unknown complexities she

associates with sexuality. In her book *Strange Bodies*, Sarah Gleeson-White writes that

Frankie ... fails to understand adult sexuality. The only sex education she receives is when she witnesses the household boarders' "common fit" (p.494) and "the unknown sin that [Barney McKean] had shown her" in the McKean's garage (p.482). These encounters with sexuality culminate in Frankie's "date" with the soldier, which goes disastrously wrong when he attempts to rape her upstairs in the Blue Moon Cafe. For Frankie, his unwelcome advance is "like a minute in the fair Crazy-House, or the real Milledgeville"(p.583), which leaves "disgust in her mouth" (p.585). (2003:17)

Given Frankie's obsession with the abnormal, especially freaks at the fair, it is

interesting that she sometimes conflates freakishness or craziness with her

vague notions about sex and sexuality, so she compares her terror and

fascination in the moment of the attempted rape with a minute at the freak

show or at an actual asylum. Her ambiguity has been apparent throughout Part

Two: she wants to be perceived as a grown up, but relishes the unfettered joy

that goes with being a child; she wants be a boy when she feels like it and girl

when she feels like it; she is attracted to freaks but is terrified of becoming one

herself. In Part One she announces her physical and existential discomfort: 'I

wish I was somebody else except me' (465). This adolescent identity crisis is

characterised by her resistance to normative gender politics coupled with the

nagging sense she has that her oddness, even freakishness, will mark her as an

unfit member of any group to which she feels she ought to belong. She thinks

she might have to make herself sexually desirable to men, but has no idea that

there may be a terrifying, violent component to this equation. She has no idea

about seduction, let alone violation. Not trying to be a child or an adult,

feminine or masculine, her sense of self-preservation comes to the fore and

'she bit down with all her might on what must have been the crazy soldier's

tongue ... [t]hen he was coming towards her with an amazed pained face, and

her hand reached the glass pitcher and brought it down upon his head' (583). She runs all the way home and reverts to the safety of her child self, with her little cousin John Henry spending the night before the wedding next to her in her bed.

In Part Three, the narrator refers to Frankie as Frances. Although this is neither the masculine, diminutive form of her name like the Frankie of Part One, nor the feminised version, like F. Jasmine in Part Two, it is sophisticated and adult-sounding, yet quite gender unspecific. By the return bus ride home from the wedding, Frankie is devastated and less certain than ever of her identity in her own eyes and in the eyes of others; the name 'Frances' is emblematic of that powerless uncertainty.

The way she sees it, Frankie's greatest obstacle to her desired outcome is her inability to communicate with the bride and groom. This is an ironic problem for such a language-focused person. 'She stood in a corner of the bride's room, wanting to say: I love the two of you so much and you are the we of me. Please take me with you from the wedding...' (590) but just as she could not understand what the red haired soldier was saying or how to speak to him, she finds that in wanting to tell Janice and Jarvis of her plans to go away with them 'her tongue was heavy in her mouth and dumb' (590). The narrator goes on to reveal that the 'wedding was all wrong' (589) but not through the fault of anyone else. 'They were all lovely to her at Winter Hill, except that they called her Frankie and treated her too young'. (590) However, '[f]rom the beginning the wedding had been queer' (589). Frankie had a detailed and specific fantasy in mind and the event that transpired was nothing like the one in her mind; this accounts for its queerness. She is too immature to grasp that

she brings her own queerness to the wedding. Fantasy is normative to the imagining subject.

Despite her acute disappointment at being treated like a child, she does go through the motions of expected, polite interaction, though she is uncharacteristically quiet until the newlyweds drive away. The contrast between the self-contained girl and the wild child throwing a tantrum is shocking. Seen through Frankie's eyes, her few hours at Winter Hill are described in one very long, moving sentence:

The wedding was like a dream, for all that came about occurred in a world beyond her power; from the moment when, sedate and proper, she shook hands with the grown people until the time, the wrecked wedding over, she watched the car with the two of them driving away from her, and, flinging herself down in the sizzling dust, she cried out for the last time: 'Take me! Take me!'—from the beginning to the end the wedding was unmanaged as a nightmare. (588)

She has humiliated herself and has seen her fantasy evaporate. The words 'dream' and 'nightmare' emphasize the extent to which events over which Frankie has no control simply unfold. She has seen where restraint gets her and chooses its opposite--excessive, unbridled passion. This is one of the last swings of the pendulum away from the ladylike behaviour that will be expected of Frankie from now on as her thirteenth birthday approaches.

Frankie, however, has not let go of the idea of nomadic escape. Even though Janice and Jarvis did not take her with them, she is determined to find a way to travel as a means to expediting the evolution of her identity. The journey itself is a liminal phase of her becoming; she is no longer at home but is not yet at her destination. Being en route without a precise end point is a powerful symbol of the unfinished nature of Frankie's identity. She plans to run away from home by train, 'If the train went to Chicago, she would go on to Hollywood and write shows or get a job as a movie starlet ...[i]f the train went

to New York, she would dress like a boy and give a false name and a false age and join the Marines' (593). Her sexual ambiguity is clear in the career choices that occur to her; the binaries of the hyperfeminine starlet caricature and the hypermasculine, uniformed fighting man in the Marines are exaggerations of the choices she thinks are available to her. Writing shows is the option that fits her best and makes no assumptions about gender roles or sexual orientation. But she realises, while hurrying further and further away from home in the middle of the night 'that she must find somebody, anybody she could join with to go away. For now she admitted she was too scared to go into the world alone' 598). Whether or not she was aware of it at the time that she hatched her plan to be a member of the wedding, part of its beauty to Frankie lay in not having to venture out alone. For a queer teenager, especially in the 1940s American south, perpetual loneliness seems a terrifying likelihood. Only the previous day, she felt connected to every other person, now 'they were strangers. In the blue light she felt queer as a person drowning' (601). Imagining oneself drowning is to see all that nurtures and sustains life drifting out of reach. She does not experience the terrifying urgency of gasping for oxygen, but is aware that her ability to become who she needs to be, in other words to allow her identity to grow and flourish, depends on connection with others as well as the opportunity to embrace various forms of exile and nomadism. Alerted by a policeman that she is trying to run away, Frankie's father comes to the Blue Moon to take her home.

Some earlier critics of McCullers have suggested that on turning thirteen and behaving in a ladylike manner Frankie succumbs to sociocultural pressure to conform. If so, then *The Member of the Wedding* ends on a note of

resignation, a sad acceptance that in order to live (though not necessarily to thrive) a young girl must leave her tomboyish ways and rein in her excesses. According to Louise Westling, ‘we find again and again the tomboy heroine suddenly confronted by society’s demands that she subdue her behavior, accept the facts of adult sexuality that she has tried to deny, and start acting ladylike’ (1985: 5).

While Frankie as Frances does, to an extent, apparently tame her wild and boyish side, there remain glimmers of hope that she will continue on her nomadic, subversive path, albeit in a more subtle way. Her new best friend, Mary Littlejohn, is two years older than she is. ‘Mary collected pictures of great masters and pasted them in an art book. They read poets like Tennyson together; and Mary was going to be a great painter and Frances a great poet – or else the foremost authority on radar. When Frances was sixteen and Mary eighteen, they were going around the world together’ (602). Frankie continues to see herself as possessing nomadic consciousness, even though she is being made to conform, to a certain extent. Her liminality seems more about abundant choices once she leaves her hometown than hovering hesitantly on the threshold before retreating to a more suitable life path. There are hints that she will find a way to escape the narrow, predetermined route set out for the southern woman.

Frankie works in the kitchen, where, as a normative teenage girl she belongs, but ‘Frances was making the sandwiches, cutting them into fancy shapes and taking great pains—for Mary Littlejohn was coming at five o’clock’, as if she were getting ready for the arrival of a lover. Berenice does not approve of the friendship ostensibly because the Littlejohns are Catholics,

‘saying that Roman Catholics worshiped Graven Images and wanted the Pope to rule the world. But for Frances this difference was a final touch of strangeness, silent terror, that completed the wonder of her love’ (603). This could be the beginning of a lesbian relationship. Frankie is no longer attracted to freak show freaks, firstly because she is supposed to have outgrown that particular fascination, but also because her new obsession, Mary, provides the ‘difference’, ‘strangeness’ and ‘silent terror’ that draw her like a magnet. I would not lament the loss of the exuberant Frankie who has had to sublimate her queer enthusiasms in order to conform. I contend that she does not ‘become a silly girl ... [t]he hard edge of her mind is gone, and all that is left is froth’ as Louise Westling asserts (1985 :131). Knowing that the beloved Mary’s arrival is imminent, the novel ends when ‘with an instant shock of happiness, she heard the ringing of the bell’ (605). Frankie’s sexual subversiveness has found a new outlet, one that will synthesize body and identity in the guise of intense adolescent friendship.

Other bodies, other realities in Bessie Head

Maru: The Body in Exile

The act of naming/being named offers clues to a character’s identity and may influence the course of one’s embodied, conscious, subjective phenomenological experience. Phenomenology can be defined as the study of the structures of experience (Woodruff Smith 2011). Thus body, self-awareness and cultural conditions are significant factors in character formation. Frankie chooses to become F. Jasmine and then Frances in *The Member of the Wedding*. She exercises agency in a way that Margaret in Bessie Head’s novel *Maru* cannot. The fact that the white woman, Margaret Cadmore names her adopted black, infant daughter Margaret Cadmore, has a

great deal to do with attempting to mould another human being in one's own image, and promises a crisis of identity for the one so named. In *Maru*, Margaret Cadmore's white, English adoptive mother returns to England from Africa--from the margins of the colony back to the centre or the metropolis--to live out her last days. Absolutely alone in the world, Margaret, now a young woman, qualifies as a primary school teacher and is 'appointed to her first teaching post in a remote, inland village, named Dilepe' (1971: 21) in Botswana. Having the mother-figure leave and herself being sent off to an unfamiliar place constitutes an intensification of her exile for Margaret on a number of levels. Body and exile are conflated by the circumstances of her birth; her Masarwa mother died in childbirth, so she was, in effect, abandoned by becoming an orphan. A newborn baby is so dependent on others for her survival that she can seem only Body at that point, as sensory awareness is in effect, but consciousness is only beginning to develop. The manner in which Margaret Cadmore senior swooped down and took the baby in is reminiscent of the way in which white colonists came in and appropriated the land and resources of the indigenous people in southern Africa, and even the peoples' precolonial identities, ostensibly 'for their own good', at incalculable cost to those colonised. Similarly, the collateral damage done to young Margaret's sense of self could never be offset by her having been given opportunities unavailable to other Masarwa children. Later, her postcard from England seeks to justify her educational experiment with the girl and her subsequent departure from Africa, saying, 'I had to do it for the sake of your people. I did not want to leave you behind. Margaret Cadmore' (20-1). What had happened in the geopolitical arena with British colonisation of southern Africa was mirrored in the microcosm of both Margarets' lives; one, the coloniser, the other, the colonised.

The fact of the younger Margaret's Masarwa racial heritage and the intense prejudice felt by the Batswana against the Masarwa would ordinarily place Margaret on the fringes of society, absolutely subaltern, but her mother-protector has given her an education and a somewhat isolated middle class life and charged her with the task of 'helping her people'. The younger woman has been protected by her foster mother who understands the extent of the prejudice against the Masarwa, so that the older woman's departure preceding young Margaret's appointment to teach in a distant village feels like an exilic banishment. Her people are perceived as slaves, dogs, outcasts, less than human, 'Masarwa is the equivalent of "nigger", a term of contempt which means, obliquely, a low, filthy nation' (12). Where Margaret lands up—in Dilepe, a village of mud huts in the middle of nowhere in Botswana—is like biblical banishment, though not as punishment for any crime apart from being 'other.' No mention is made of a community that Margaret may have come from. Margaret the elder and her ineffectual husband raised her in their home and treated her kindly, but not warmly like a biological daughter, 'No doubt, she lived on the edge of something. The relationship between her and the woman was never that of a child and its mother' (17). The pattern of the colonised and coloniser is repeated in this travesty of a family-like arrangement.

Even in the home in which she was raised, Margaret's in-betweenness and emotional isolation is apparent. Is she a daughter, a servant or a ward? And, whichever of these she is perceived to be affects how she perceives herself. In the face of this liminality, the question arises as to the location or fixedness of the self. Is Margaret's or anyone's identity given or constructed, or is it an ever-changing process that responds to both inherent and external forces? Margaret's foster mother believes she has the answer and is described as being 'a scientist in her heart with a lot of fond,

pet theories, one of her favourite, sweeping theories being: environment everything; heredity nothing' (15). But heredity is most immediately evident in the body, so it cannot be 'nothing' since it is tangibly something. Environment, heredity and changing life circumstances all affect identity. As the novel progresses, the notion of arriving at a fixed identity based solely on 'nurture', as the foster mother avers, becomes increasingly ludicrous. Clearly, childhood is not a factory that churns out a finished product. The omniscient narrator comments on Margaret's growing awareness of her own experience:

There seemed to be a big hole in the child's mind between that time that she slowly became conscious of her life in the home of the missionaries and conscious of herself as a person. A big hole was there because, unlike other children, she was never able to say: 'I am this or that.' (15)

Margaret cannot performatively declare who she is until much later, nor does she look definitively like 'this or that'. When Dikeledi first meets her, she thinks that 'the near perfect English accent and manners did not fit her looks. In fact, not one thing about her fitted another and she looked half like a Chinese and half like an African and half like God knows what' (23).

Issues of body and identity are inherently interwoven and this evident in Head's writing which should not be approached from the perspective of sociological or cultural-historical examination alone, but also as a close textual analysis of literariness conditioned by the influence of the cultural moment. What Francoise Lionnet argues in her comparative analysis of three writers, one of whom is Head, is true also of the characters in this study,

...it is important to stress that they are not meant to be in any way "representative" of a particular cross-section of "real" women. Rather, they are intended to function as literary figures ... whose extreme predicaments haunt the reader's imagination, and help to crystallize awareness of gender oppression while problematizing these issues in reference to a specific cultural context' (Lionnet 1993: 134).

The cultural context must take into account the issue of generationality amongst the writers in this study, their times, and, of course, place. McCullers grew up in the 1930s and 1940s in the south and wrote back to narrow, repressive attitudes. Head grew up in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s and wrote her hatred of racist and sexist behaviour, but wrestled in her writing with how to think about homosexuality. In the upcoming sections dealing with the work of Allison and Wicomb who both grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, I will also examine how they problematize social issues “in reference to a specific cultural context”. Thus both the unique narrative style of each writer as well as the ethos in which she was raised result in a particular literary product. This observation of Lionnet’s is applicable to characterisation in the work of all four authors addressed in this study. Later in the same paragraph, Lionnet astutely asserts that ‘rigorous textual analysis can help us trace the somewhat puzzling, and disturbing, commonalities among these writers, analyze the differences, and outline the ways in which their narrative strategies deconstruct and/or reinforce existing symbolic frameworks’ (135).

Certainly, cultural specificity and the pervasiveness in Head’s work of women’s subjection to social controls--by indigenous men as well as colonisers—is critical in the character’s identity formation, but should not be taken as a generalisation about ‘women’s’ experience or ‘African women’s’ experience. Head’s choice of a Masarwa woman as protagonist is extremely significant in that the author has what might have been an invisible, silenced shadow creature wrest language from the racially and gender-dominant forces and use it to speak for herself. Interestingly, Head herself never learned to speak Setswana beyond some basic phrases of greeting. She communicated in English, a language almost universally, if sometimes

rudimentarily, spoken by people in South Africa and Botswana.⁶⁴ The author's sophisticated use of written and spoken English sets her apart from most coloured South Africans for whom Afrikaans intermingled with dialect is the first language. She distinguishes her character in a similar way. By stepping into the light and vocalising her individuality, Margaret refuses the anonymity of the stereotype. This transcendence, itself a passage occasioned by disrupted expectations, reinforces the notion that identity keeps changing and that at any point on the journey, linguistic self-representation brings up issues of truth and agency. Head's work pushes the other characters and the reader to new apprehensions of the fluidity of identity and belonging.

Margaret does not belong in Dilepe yet achieves, fleetingly and from time to time, a level of peaceful self-acceptance while continuing to live a creative and productive life both interacting with and separate from the village where she teaches. Perhaps because she has lived all her life on the fringes, she has either strategized ways of being or acquired them through trial and error, to enable herself to function in the orbit of her own making, in a corridor between worlds. She continues to have to field hostility directed towards her. Instead of reacting in any expected way, like fighting back or crying, she retreats to an intensely angry place within her own head (she tells Dikeledi she is relieved that she didn't kill any of the schoolchildren in her care who taunted her) or to an intensely creative place—where she draws and paints frenetically, all alone in her converted library room on a hill. Head deploys the dynamics of imagination and lived reality through Margaret's art. Already an exile, she withdraws further into herself, solitary in pain or pleasure. Knowing something

⁶⁴ In *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 48 (2), 2011. L.J. Rafapa, A.Z. Nengome and H.S. Tshamano write: 'The fact "that Bessie Head was to remain an outsider despite her interest in the history and village tales of Serowe, mainly because of her refusal to learn Setswana" (Mosieleng 2004:57), is evidence enough that her conception of herself as an African is complex' (115).

about Bessie Head's experience, aspects of the characterisation of Margaret in *Maru* may be taken as loosely autobiographical. Both author and character are solitary, creative exiles; the former's expression of imagination and self-representation is through the medium of words, the latter's through drawing and painting. Neither Head nor Margaret, reflect life as it is in their work. Elleke Boehmer accords Margaret's art-as-expression enormous significance as a transformative theme in the novel: '*Maru* recounts the tale of a woman who learns to paint—to *figure*—and in so doing undergoes significant changes of status and position in her society: from having no place or recognition she becomes a figure in the community' (2005: 127).

Margaret could have been drawn as disempowered by her gender, but, interestingly, she is initially a stronger figure, possessing more agency because of the power she has as an exotic woman over some of the influential men in her new community. Within a day or two of her arrival, Moleka, the playboy bureaucrat who works at the Dilepe Tribal Administration office, and Maru, the man who will become the paramount chief, are both profoundly affected by Margaret's presence. There are hardly any details of what she looks like, but she is described as having a kind of magnetic grace. Other men also seem entranced by her, including the truck driver who brings her to Dilepe and Ranko, a spy in Maru's employ. In contrast, however, the principal of Leseding school, Pete, on discovering that she is a Masarwa, immediately demotes her from human to 'it' in his mind and sets about plotting her removal. Negative as this may be, it indicates the extent to which her arrival provokes the community to different reactions. Margaret's arrival has a powerful ripple effect on the village because it highlights the issue of the body as repellent, being evidence of outcast status, and at the same time attractive in its sexual power.

In the introductory paragraph to his 1991 article, “Colonization and the Feminine in Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power*”, Paul Lorenz does *Maru* a great disservice. In defending his choice of *A Question of Power* (1974) as the object of his analysis, he oversimplifies and dismisses *Maru* with no acknowledgment of the role the novel played in Head’s development as a writer. The themes in *Maru* of liminal subjectivity and the shifting nature of a character’s fragmented self are clear precursors to the psychic splintering experienced by the protagonist, Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power*. Lorenz’s comment on *Maru* is reductionist. He says that if his ‘purpose were merely to discuss [Head’s] her presentation of the power relationships that exist between the sexes in postcolonial Botswana’, he would ‘have done better to have chosen her novel *Maru* or one of the short stories in *The Collector of Treasures* as [his] primary text’. Certainly, *Maru* is about much more than these gender “power relationships” since Margaret’s Masarwa heritage is equally important in terms of her perceived place in the power hierarchy. While this novel does stress racialised gender dissymmetry or black sexism, it also addresses black on black racism, all of which originate with and in the body.

The literary creation that is Margaret far exceeds merely representing a type. She is a liminal entity; in defying the Masarwa stereotype, she steps outside the circle of the expected and surprises the other characters by her uniqueness. She is well educated, quiet and self-sufficient. She lives alone up on a hill in a disused library away from the houses of the village below. She looks and lives like a exile. Regarding the day to day activities and interactions of Dilepe village life, the narrator says of Margaret, ‘She was not a part of it and belonged nowhere’ (93). Yet Margaret settles into the old library and makes it her home, despite the sense of impermanence she has about her current place—in her job and the village—all due to the fact of her otherness, which

may cause her to be hounded out of town. Ironically, the building is now devoid of books and books are the physical manifestations of voice. The new occupant is not, however, voiceless. Her medium, though, is art rather than the written word.

Regarding the gendered body, when Moleka is initially smitten by Margaret, he chastises himself for responding to the totality of her being, whose *spirit*, visible in her eyes, to his astonishment, awakens his feelings: “‘It’s madness,” he thought. “I hardly know her.” What were her legs like? He could not say. All the force of her life was directed to her eyes, as though that were the only living part of her’ (32). Head presents a utopian notion of spiritual love and offers almost no physical cues to the reader by which to visualise Margaret. The implication here is that true love is not first the reaction of the sexualised body to the object of its attraction. The sensation she describes is transcendent, which is not to say that she denies body altogether, but does not, in this instance, allow lust into the moment of almost magical recognition. Love, here, is felt first as a sensation in the heart, and both Margaret and Moleka are aware of their surging hearts at the same moment: ‘Her mouth silently shaped the word: “Oh,” and she raised her hand towards her heart’ (30). Moleka thinks back on that same moment and recalls, ‘There was no barrier of the spirit. He had talked straight to her heart’ (77). As he walks up the hill towards the old library where Margaret lives, he considers how strange it is that he, Moleka the playboy, wants permission from someone to sexualise his feelings. He wants to hear, ‘All right, proceed. You may love this woman’s body as well’ (78). Head exaggerates the perceived body-soul binary with the decision seemingly made by Moleka’s feet, not mind, to continue his climb up to the library, possibly in hopes of consummation. Head may be foreshadowing her own impending psychotic crisis in which the body seems to operate separately from the mind.

In the novel, rather than visual description of Margaret, the reader is shown the character by how people react to her. Here is the link between body and exile. Her characterisation depends a great deal on what she says and how she says it; a direct connection is made between the body and the word, character and language. Margaret could lie and say she is coloured, but she will not; she says quite distinctly, performatively, in fact, 'I am a Masarwa' (24) and in so doing, she speaks her self into being so that body/mind unite for the moment of that utterance.

Initially, very little insight is given into what Margaret is thinking or feeling. That inscrutability makes her more intriguing. The narrator shows us inside Moleka's and Maru's heads, rivals for Margaret's love, but not inside hers. The disembodied third person semi-omniscient narrator gets around to reporting Margaret's thoughts and feelings quite late in the novel; however, the style is stilted and at a remove. This emphasises her otherness—her physical difference, emotional distance, the mystery that surrounds her and the fact of her liminality. When Dikeledi, Maru's sister and Margaret's best friend, tells Margaret that she is pregnant by Moleka and will marry him, 'The pain was so intense she had to bite on her mouth to prevent herself from crying out loud...There was a point at which she was no longer a Masarwa but the equal in quality and stature of the woman who sat opposite her... No other woman could have killed her, but she knew Dikeledi through and through and her soul was a towering giant' (118). The enormity of Margaret's love for Moleka only becomes apparent when she discovers that she will lose him to her best friend. Her reaction is to feel as if her neck has been broken. Head describes the physical symptoms of Margaret's disappointed love, the deep sadness of spirit that manifests as a broken heart, or, in this case, a metaphorically snapped neck, temporarily choking and silencing the victim.

Head's characters exhibit various manifestations of apparently conflicting traits; she plays on the dualities and ambiguities of their personalities. Margaret is two people in one body; one cowers, the other struts. Her close friend, Dikeledi, 'had seen that morning also that she was very violent and dominant but seemingly unable to project that hidden power. You were never sure whether she was greater than you, or inferior, because of this constant flux and inter-change between her two images' (71). Dikeledi's brother, Maru, is also pieced together in conflicting ways, described as a gentle man who 'always fell in love with his women', (35) and also that 'half of him was a demon' (70). The complexity and paradoxical nature of some characters in this novel, certainly of Margaret, prefigure the absolute psychic splintering of Head's protagonist, Elizabeth, in the next novel.

A Question of Power : Madness Unsettles Boundaries

Describing her protagonist Elizabeth's descent into madness in *A Question of Power* provides Bessie Head vast creative opportunities including fictionalising her own frightening experience with mental breakdown. Helen Kapstein says of Head that 'the trope of madness opens a range of transgressive border-crossings, and allows her to shuttle between various identities, genders, sexualities, and nation-states. This activity is not a stealthy, undercover passing, but a kind of trespassing, a visible movement that calls attention to itself' (2003:71) and is a lot like nomadism both in terms of subversive consciousness as well as movement from place to place. Consciousness of borders is a theme that will have characterised the life of any non-white person in South Africa during apartheid. Under apartheid, as well as before 1948, the attempt to contain the colonised regulated every aspect of life by imposing boundaries, both physical and legal on the South African people. The Pass Laws and the Group Areas Act are the most obvious manifestations of physical containment and

control. Depending on one's racial category, one was permitted to live and work only in certain areas, and movement across forbidden lines in pursuit of fulfilling the basic need for food and shelter was criminalised. Similarly, transgression of social strictures was often deemed madness.

In the South African context, madness has long provided a convenient trope for difference and threat in general. In a society where other more volatile differences such as race, gender, and sexuality have been subsumed under the label 'madness,' culturally outlawed activities such as political resistance, miscegenation, and homosexuality pass as the antics of the insane. (Kapstein 2003: 72)

Although there are places in *A Question of Power* where Head's writing reveals that her characters are vehemently homophobic, there are also places where she shows that Elizabeth, a coloured woman living in Botswana, is sexually and romantically drawn to women. She seems to equate male homosexuality with some sort of innate weakness or inferiority that goes along with being coloured—neither black nor white—yet she acknowledges her own masculine side, as if she is endorsing Medusa's disparagement of coloured people. Medusa is the black female figment of Elizabeth's imagination, a character who taunts and tortures her. Elizabeth internalises her negative apprehensions of transgressive sexuality and transgressive race which she connects with one other:

In South Africa she had been rigidly classified Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn't any escape from that for anyone in South Africa. They were races, not people. She had lived for a time in a part of South Africa where nearly all the Coloured men were homosexuals and openly paraded down the street dressed in women's clothes. They tied turbans round their heads, wore lipstick, fluttered their eyes and hands, and talked in high, falsetto voices. It was so widespread, so common to so many men in this town that they felt no shame at all. They and people in general accepted it as a disease one had to live with. (44-5)

Head's word choices of 'shame' and 'disease' are extraordinarily homophobic; through her Elizabeth conflates being gay with a deviant yet enthusiastic attempt at obtaining 'the simple joy of being a human being with a personality' which is so

elusive for coloured South Africans. It is not clear whether Elizabeth's presence in the narrative allows these judgments to be distanced from the writer herself, but the issue of whose homophobia this is problematises point of view. It is as if Medusa elicits an awareness of the racial and sexual taintedness or essential impurity of a person who is seen as not all one thing or all the other, but liminal. In her manic hallucinations and nightmares, Elizabeth sees these coloured men, neither black nor white, feminised though male, slowly dying and 'Medusa's mocking smile towering over them all. "You see, that's what you are like," she said. "That's your people, not African people. You're too funny for words. You have to die like them"' (45). Medusa proclaims their inferiority based, primarily, on their mixed race, and Elizabeth internalises this, coming back obsessively to the stuck record that chants insults at her for being coloured—"Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death' (45)--and later: '(S)he wasn't a genuine African; she was a half-breed' (104). The dying men are doubly demonised, for being coloured and for being gay. These men are corporeally marked and separated from the mainstream.

Later, Elizabeth will discover that Sello has a boyfriend and that Dan will have sex with anyone or anything, and that Tom, the American volunteer, according to Dan 'had the potential to be a homosexual, but he wasn't yet' (160). So even though at one point in the novel she dismisses gay, coloured men as impure as much because of their mixed blood as their sexual orientation, she later comes to believe that any man, black, like Sello or Dan, or white, like Tom, will engage in homosexual behaviour because all men's impulse for sexual gratification is stronger than their ability or desire to resist it. Her disgust is palpable, but, as I will show, it is complicated by her own sexual urges.

As a single parent, a woman alone who is clearly not in search of a partner, Elizabeth presents as asexual and is celibate throughout the novel. Her disapproval of and distaste for '[d]epravity and perversion of the most base degree' (43) is ironically met with vision upon vision of the intensely erotic. She has an ambivalent attitude towards her own body, as if she is afraid of acknowledging her sexual nature, perhaps because of the mysterious circumstances under which she was conceived. Her white mother and black father flouted what would become under apartheid the Immorality Act, the legal prohibition against miscegenation; whether this played out as rape or the act of mutually consenting adults, she cannot know, and this may be the source of her obsession with sex. When the section of the novel focused on Dan begins, he is quickly associated with women of loose morals, who are both insatiable and dirty; they must bathe before he will have sex with them. Elizabeth seems to endorse this view of the women as dirty and takes pains to keep herself clean and presentable, in an entirely separate category from 'Dan's seventy-one nice-time girls' (173). 'She washed and dressed, then had to comb her hair in the mirror. She flinched and looked away. There was an unnameable horror there. She could not endure to look at it. How could someone run away from their own mind?' (46). She may be running away from her own mind, but she is also avoiding looking at her own body in the reflection. If she sees the pain in her eyes, then she is looking into the abyss of her embodied mind unravelling. No wonder she has to look away.

As Elizabeth exiles herself further from her body, she refers to her vagina as 'not such a pleasant area of the body to concentrate on, possibly only now and then if necessary' (44). This comment is quite surprising, coming, as it does immediately after Medusa sends some kind of sensual shockwave telepathically through Elizabeth.

If Medusa is a feminine force, then the sensation described is the result of homoeroticism; a woman bringing another woman to orgasm.

Medusa was smiling. She had some top secret information to impart to Elizabeth. It was about her vagina. Without any bother for decencies she sprawled her long black legs in the air, and the most exquisite sensation travelled out of her toward Elizabeth. It enveloped Elizabeth from head to toe like a slow, deep, sensuous bomb. It was like falling into deep, warm waters, lazily raising one hand and resting in a heaven of bliss. (44)

There is apparently no homophobia in the word choices here: 'exquisite', 'heaven' and 'bliss', neither is there the opportunity for Elizabeth to savour whatever it was that had just happened. Medusa's next step plunges Elizabeth into 'a deep hole of such excruciating torture that, briefly, she went stark, raving mad' (44). But perhaps a latent homophobia is what really pushes Elizabeth off the edge again. She will not allow herself to process intellectually the physical sensation that has just passed. If she emphasises any binary opposition, it is the mind-body split. Ironically, the bodily sensation she experienced was caused by a disembodied apparition, while her flesh-and-blood friend, Kenosi, is described in spiritual terms.

Elizabeth's admiration for her good friend, Kenosi, is a strange mixture, at first, of possible same sex romantic attraction, and, later, an affirmation of patriarchal values and the expected subject position and attributes of a submissive post-tribal wife. Of the unmarried Kenosi Elizabeth observes:

She was really an exceedingly beautiful woman in strength and depth of facial expression, in knowingness and grasp of life; its sorrows, its joys, its expected disillusionment. She was really the super-wife, the kind who would keep a neat, ordered house and adore in a quiet, undemonstrative way both the husband and children.

"If I were a man I'd surely marry you," Elizabeth said gaily. (90)

Non-normative sexuality and gender liminality are thresholds that Elizabeth herself transgresses in the novel and observes being transgressed.

Early on, she aligns herself with male characters, like Sello and Tom. She and Tom would sit and have philosophical conversations. Tom points out that she is unlike other women: she bridges some kind of a gap between his usual expectations of male and female friendships, and is more like a man friend—‘You’re a strange woman, Elizabeth. The things you draw out of a man! You know, men don’t really discuss the deep metaphysical profundities with women... their deepest feelings they reserve for other men’ (24). Elizabeth extrapolates from this comment that ‘that was the only reasonable explanation of the relationship between Sello and her. The base of it was masculine’ (24). Her body constitutes the space where all kinds of boundaries are crossed, including the porous border between sanity and madness.

Body and Representation: Dorothy Allison

In a piece entitled ‘Deciding to Live’, which appears as a preface to the first edition of *Trash*, Dorothy Allison describes her struggle with and decision to engage with constructing a what Judith Butler would call livable world. She finds she needs to integrate lesbian feminist thought and action and synthesize her own exilic, self-destructiveness back into an embodied consciousness that chooses to live by writing. Her approach is phenomenological:

Writing these stories is the only way I know to make sure of my ongoing decision to live, to set moment to moment a small piece of stubbornness against an ocean of ignorance and obliteration. I write stories. I write fiction. I put on the page a third look at what I’ve seen in life –the condensed and reinvented experience of a cross-eyed, working-class lesbian, addicted to violence, language, and hope, who has made the decision to live, is determined to live, on the page and on the street, for me and mine. (7)

The question of representativity is easily answered here. Allison is representing only herself and her unique experience of how writing helped her to choose to live. Here, the author’s addictions to both language and hope converge in her compulsion to

write. Her story may encourage a reader somewhere to decide to live, too, perhaps by removing herself from harmful circumstances or to stop causing self-inflicted physical and emotional damage. The body, moving beyond mere survival, wants next to thrive.

Most people who want to live welcome opportunities for bodily satisfaction and joyful connection with other human beings. This connection is what McCullers's lonely characters are seeking and it is what Head simultaneously desires and is repulsed by as she sinks deeper into paranoia. Allison celebrates corporeal pleasure, food and sex, in her story 'A Lesbian Appetite'.

Bodily Be/Longing: Dorothy Allison's "A Lesbian Appetite" ⁶⁵

Which comes first, the body or the word? Allison, interrogating racial and sexual identities, offers a significant treatment of this dynamic by placing the physical body and discursively produced lesbian subjects at the centre of her story. Christina Jarvis argues that this story provides a particularly useful intervention within recent queer theory, suggesting that it offers sexual identities that are performative as well as attentive to the specificities of race, class, sex, ethnicity, *and* the body (2000: 764) and, I would add, regional cuisine.

I am especially interested in this story in the liminal subjectivities of the discursive and corporeal body, hungry and queer. While there is in the postmodern approach an overwhelming sense of indeterminacy in literature and life, there remains another force requiring that we acknowledge the corporeality of the body, the real, tangible materiality. I argue for the transformative integration of mind and matter, theory and practice; thus I will apply materialist feminism informed by a postmodern consciousness to Allison's work. Here, language creates the possibility of change and

⁶⁵ A version of this section was previously presented by me at the Eighth International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities at UCLA and later published as 'Foreign Bodies: Be/Longing and Gender in the Short Fiction of Dorothy Allison' in *The International Journal of the Humanities*, Volume 8, 2010

constructs the concept of change, thereby opening the way to bring it into being. If liminality is an in-between space, a threshold or a passageway, it need not only be seen as a constraining space followed by a single, final destination. On the contrary, liminality offers the opportunity for integration and transcendence once the agent steps away from her earlier circumstances and emerges into the open at the other end of the passageway. The female body in transit may be that of an exile or a tourist or a nomad; the point being that she is moving away from one place and forward towards another, physically and metaphorically.

The relationship in 'A Lesbian Appetite' between language and corporeality demonstrates the integration of theory and practice. There is a synthesis of mind and body foregrounded by hunger and eating, desire and sex, as signifiers. In other words, the mind-body dichotomy is comparable to the theory-practice dichotomy. Both, when synthesized, transcend limiting binaries. Giovanna Colombetti and Evan Thompson describe the embodied consciousness that precedes the act of ascribing words to experience: "Meaning and experience are created by, or enacted through, the continuous, reciprocal interaction of the brain, the body, and the world" (2008: 56). The next step is to think, speak, or in Allison's case, write a version of this interaction.

Allison's first sentence of her story consists of one word: 'Biscuits'. The substantial materiality and southern connotations of that single word set the stage for the narrator's dreams of food and home conflated, of memories of people and tastes, of her urgent compulsion to put the words on paper that make up the story of a poor, white lesbian that she tells differently every time in her work. The word 'Biscuits' is weighted with unanticipated significance as it comes before the introduction of the autobiographical 'I' or a present tense verb, both of which a reader might expect. The question arises whether to categorize 'A Lesbian Appetite' as autobiography, fiction,

or a hybrid. Putting lived experience into words changes the work from factual reporting to the creative account of affective experience, the writing of which reshapes the author's memory and emotions surrounding what she went through. I read this work conscious of the shifting dynamic between narrator and author as self and character. Allison positions herself geographically as a southern transplant or exile who is searching for physical and psychic sustenance away from South Carolina. She misses the familiar, particularly the food, but her feelings about her experiences growing up in the south are far more complex than mere nostalgia. The endless helix of identity development includes the embodied self, the constant becoming of individual identity and of the person in the contexts of family, community and nation.

Materiality and theory, integrated body and ideas, figure into Allison's endeavour to 'make[s] for a livable world'. She opts for exile in order to survive as a woman who was the victim of incestuous childhood rape and as a lesbian in a homophobic environment. She leaves home, yet carries parts of home with her wherever she goes. It is not possible to break completely with the past, and the imprint of one's formative experiences will affect the search for a livable world. Food and love are crucial here. In 'A Lesbian Appetite', Dorothy Allison conveys a variety of important subject positions and concepts by writing about meals she has shared with her lovers over the years and describing the sex-as-eating aspect of lesbian oral sex. Allison's own background as an often-hungry, poor, white Southern child is revealed in her detailed description of her food dreams and this complicates the ambiguous fiction/autobiography intersection at work here.

The specificity of the step-by-step food preparation spelled out in the first sentence describing her dream is a deliberate strategy to suggest the time it takes to achieve a successful outcome, it emphasises process, which has significance for the

search for a livable world, and, more immediately, it indicates the speaker's increasing appetite and desire for this meal. The dream hints at a kind of culinary foreplay. She will defer gratification in order to cook this meal to perfection, even if it means soaking the beans overnight and being tempted by the aroma of the simmering ingredients for hours the next day:

I dream about picking over beans, soaking them overnight, chopping pork fat, slicing onions, putting it all in a great iron pot to bubble for hour after hour ... Mustard greens, collards, turnip greens, and poke—can't find them anywhere in the shops up North. In the middle of the night I wake desperate for the taste of greens, get up and find a twenty-four hour deli that still has a can of spinach and half a pound of bacon. I fry the bacon, dump it in the spinach, bring the whole mess to a boil, and eat it with tears in my eyes. It doesn't taste like anything I really wanted to have... (162)

The anticipation of appetite satisfied turns into deep disappointment, in this case, as the makeshift ingredients do not approximate the rich flavour of home (ambivalent though she is about 'home') that she dreams about.

In her autobiographical narrative, 'Identity: Skin Blood Heart', Minnie Bruce Pratt problematises home, and this understanding of the contradictory nature of home--often idealized as a safe place, but actually a place of oppression or repression--is crucial to an examination of the link between home and identity in Allison's work. Even the delicious-tasting foods the speaker associates with home, artery-clogging blood pressure triggers, paradoxically will not nourish her; they might eventually kill her. The mother-daughter relationship is similarly problematised where the source of life and the expectation of nurturance is linked to pain and suffering.

'A Lesbian Appetite' not only addresses the appetites for food and sex and their complicated relationship with home and belonging, it also confronts the issues of race, class and self-image through diet: 'Poor white trash I am for sure. I eat shit food and am not worthy' (162). The author's use of the present tense highlights the fact that that sense of herself as a child, constructed out of the judgmental gaze of others,

has contributed to her ongoing sense of herself even into adulthood. She goes on to describe the irony of her body's reaction to what *is* supposed to be good for her. The incident with the seventh grade nutrition teacher underlines her hyperconsciousness of class, of being perceived as inferior, and of the fact that 'Mama always said that smart was the only way out' (167). Poverty and perceived inferiority collide with whiteness in the racially segregated south. The author's family is not simply poor or inferior, they are a distinct category of poor and inferior which is magnified by their whiteness and accompanied by shame. In an acutely racialised society, white people, unlike black people, are seen as having no excuse for having squandered the apparent advantage of their 'superior' race. Those white people who are dissolute and hopeless are designated worthless 'trash' by whites who are better off, and therefore, better. The speaker remembers the teacher whose attitude continues to haunt her, but also evokes a powerful will to resistance. She is determined not to fulfil the teacher's prophecy:

Everybody knew she hated teaching, hated her students, especially those of us in badly fitting worn-out dresses sucking bacon rinds ... she looked at us with disgust she didn't bother to conceal...
... "Vitamin D," the teacher told us, "is paramount. Deny it to a young child and the result is the brain never develops properly" (167)

The narrator, refusing the victimhood of marginalization, especially the designation of intellectual deficiency, says: 'Feed me milk, feed me cream, feed me what I need to fight them'. After that, she drank milk compulsively, only to discover as an adult that her painful stomach symptoms were the result of lactose intolerance: 'Twenty years later the doctor sat me down to tell me the secrets of my body'(167).

Allison writes about the crisis of bodily and spiritual deprivation and dis-ease being solved in the speaker's dreams, 'If I cannot eat what I want, then I'll eat what I must, but my dreams will always be flooded with salt and grease, crisp fried stuff that

sweetens my mouth and feeds my soul’(163). As bad as this food is for her, she craves it and, perhaps, conflates it with the ambiguous, even disappointing love her mother had for her, feeding her but not protecting her from her stepfather, making home simultaneously appealing as a concept and terrifying in fact.

The diet of poor southerners is among the worst in the world, though it’s tasty, very tasty. There’s pork fat or chicken grease in every dish; white sugar in the cobblers, pralines, and fudge; and flour, fat, and salt in the gravies—lots of salt in everything. The vegetables get cooked to limp strands with no fiber left at all. Mothers give sidemeat to their toddlers as pacifiers and slip them whiskey with honey at the first sign of teething, a cold, or a fever. Most of my cousins lost their teeth in their twenties and took up drinking as easily as they put sugar in their iced tea. I try not to eat so much sugar, try not to drink, try to limit pork and salt and white flour, but the truth is I am always hungry for it—the smell and taste of the food my mama fed me. (162)

The first part of the excerpt has the objective tone of an anthropologist. The latter half personalises the experience of Allison herself and her cousins as ‘poor southerners’, and, finally, her words convey the immediacy of first-person, present tense embodied subjectivity.

Allison elegantly negotiates her way into and out of a variety of registers in this piece. She moves from anthropologist to family biographer to autobiographer to writer of erotica, all within a few paragraphs. Sex and food converge in the episode where Allison describes her lover at the time, Lee, preparing eggplant in the kitchen. She writes that Lee tries to entice her to eat wholesome foods and there are numerous descriptions of her cooking with healthy ingredients, the way a stereotypical mother might feed her cherished child. Although Allison usually identifies herself as femme, which might lead one to expect Lee to be butch, the expectation of a performative masculine/feminine binary is disrupted by an intriguing simile, ‘She looked like a mother in a Mary Cassatt painting, standing in her sunlit kitchen, sprinkling raw sea salt with one hand and pushing her hair back with the other’

(165). The author's description of Lee salting the fruit to make it sweat out its poisons anticipates the erotic encounter that is about to transpire. The firm consistency of the eggplant's shiny, dark, purple outer skin and its soft, inner, white flesh just beginning to ooze on contact with salt is a reflection of the women's arousal. The food preparation quickly turns into foreplay, with the speaker as the instigator, and progresses to a full-scale sexual experience on the kitchen floor with ingredients and bodily secretions as the props. When Allison interrupts Lee's food preparation with her sexual overtures, Lee's response is, 'I'm gonna make you eat all this', in a statement that fuses the language of food consumption and oral sex.

"Of course." I pushed eggplant out of the way and slipped two fingers between her labia. She was slicker than peanut oil...
 "Oh you!" Her hips rose up into my hand. All her hair had come loose and was trailing in the flour. She wrapped one hand in my hair, the other around my left breast. "I'll cook you... just you wait. I'll cook you a meal to drive you crazy."
 "Oh, honey." She tasted like fry bread—thick, smoked, and fat-rich on my tongue. (166)

The flavours Lee tastes of are the delicious, unhealthy southern foods that haunt the speaker's dreams and memories of home. Extrapolating from her similes, oral sex reminds her of food from her childhood; food exceeds its usual role here. As the story's narrator says, 'food is more than sustenance: it is history. I remember women by what we ate together, what they dug out of the freezer after we'd made love for hours'. (162) When she is away at college and is not feeling well, she craves hot biscuits 'at my mama's table. The biscuits dripped memories as well as butter' (163). These biscuits recall the word 'Biscuits' that open the story. Hunger and desire are conflated. Food as double entendre brings sex and home together in the form of the speaker's girlfriend, Jay, who 'leans forward and cups her hands around my face. "What

you hungry for, girl, huh? You tell me. You tell mama exactly what you want”” (175).

A psychoanalytical approach that advances us beyond Freud’s oedipal-displacement understanding of lesbianism is that it is the sexualized desire to be reunited with the mother or a mother-substitute and to consume or be consumed by her.⁶⁶ Diana Fuss (1995: 65) posits that

[T]he more difficult question for interpreters of Freud is determining precisely how the agencies of identification and desire are invoked to fashion this particular structural relation of dependency between homosexuality and motherhood, and why the first term (homosexuality) must always be read in relation to, and must eventually give way to, the second term (motherhood) (67).

There is a verbatim repetition in ‘A Lesbian Appetite’ where the speaker’s lover echoes her mother’s words to her. When she was a schoolgirl her mother said to her, “‘It’s good to watch you eat,” my mama smiled at me’ (163). Years later, another of the speaker’s lovers repeats her mother’s words, “‘It’s good to watch you eat,” Mona told me, serving me dill bread, sour cream, and fresh tomatoes’ (164). A more directly autobiographical reading of the story is useful here in analysing the mother-daughter relationship. Desiring the mother in this instance may have to do with wanting to rewrite, that is, to change her memory of the brutal rape Allison experienced at the hands of her stepfather, and replace it with a gentle, nurturing episode that welcomes the formerly abandoned child back to the mother’s womb. Even if she could not rewrite the rape itself, Dorothy Allison ends *Bastard out of Carolina*, her autobiographical novel that recounts the violent abuse, with a sense of longing for a mother who would have tried to protect her child and, if that were not possible, who

⁶⁶ It is interesting, in light of Allison’s actual childhood trauma to read Fuss’s analysis of Freud regarding the mother-substitute approach to lesbianism. ‘Freud immediately disavows, however, [this] homosexual daughter-mother incest by reading it as a displacement of a preceding heterosexual daughter-father incest’. He avoids or refuses straightforward lesbian desire without some pre-existing heterosexual violation.

would have chosen her child over the abusive man, and helped that child to heal. Her mother did none of these things. Returning to the womb would be like starting over. It represents the fantasy of recreating the original home, and, therefore, recharting one's subsequent trajectory in life. Since there can be no return to the source, there must be wandering in search of a new physical home as well as a new idea of home. In the course of this journey, the liminal subject crosses various thresholds, literally and figuratively, and emerges changed and changing, her identity in flux.

The dissolution of the notion of rigid identity categories presents performativity in place of static being; it illuminates how identity is a kind of dynamic doing that cannot be singular or unified. Insofar as identity is constituted by place, Allison/the speaker, the exilic subject, remakes herself every time she moves to a new home or takes a new lover. Although she may bring the same physical body and an assortment of material objects from her former life in order to approximate the longed-for security of the imagined home, she also has an opportunity to discursively and performatively reinvent herself. By eating the current lover's preferred foods, she even reconstitutes herself physically. Barbara Kennedy synthesizes Deleuzian ideas on 'becoming' and 'affect' in her work on post-feminist film theory. Aspects of this synthesis are useful to an analysis of Allison's creation of her literary persona.

What 'becoming-woman' in Deleuzian terms does is enable a view of woman in relation to the elemental, the material, the local, forces (matter, passion, chaos, affection, affect) where subjectivity is replaced through a materiality and a molecularity of 'becoming'.

While it is apparent that the speaker in 'A Lesbian Appetite' is always becoming, her subjectivity and agency are not subsumed by affect, as Kennedy after Deleuze might have us believe. Rather, the evolution of her subjectivity

and her sexuality is inextricable from the ongoing formation of her identity. Her identity, indeed her sexual identity, has to do with the integration of subjectivity and materiality in the context of socio-cultural factors at work in the world, or, to quote Colombetti and Thompson again, ‘the reciprocal interaction of the brain, the body, and the world’ (56).

The parade of the speaker’s lovers dispels narrow ideas about same sex attraction. The women she loves are unique, complex individuals who come to life outside of categorisation as either/or, butch or femme. Lee, Jay and Victoria are the women described in most detail. Although Jay refers to herself as ‘mama’ in the earlier exchange, the author makes it clear that she does not present as soft and maternal like Lee does, yet subverting any essentialist, imitative homosexual gender constructs, Jay speaks the way a gentle mother might, rather than in the gruff, masculine tones of the type, “‘You hungry, honey?’” she purrs’. Although she sounds femme in this instance, she is not soft and feminine like another girlfriend of whom the speaker says, ‘[s]he was beautiful, Victoria in her black cloud of curls’ (177). She says to pretty Victoria, who looks like and plays the well-off, white southern belle, itself a form of passing or performativity, ‘Girl...girl, you should just let me feed you what you really need’ (178). Interestingly from an oedipal Freudian perspective, the speaker and her lovers refer to themselves and each other interchangeably as ‘girl’ and ‘mama’. In this story, Jay is the woman most typically butch in appearance and performance, ‘Jay does karate, does it religiously, going to class four days a week and working out at the gym every other day. Her muscles are hard and long’(174). That the speaker is not

always only attracted to a particular 'type' suggests the complexity of desire and the range of sexual possibilities for all people.

The concluding paragraphs of 'A Lesbian Appetite' describe a recurrent dream Allison/the speaker has been having of a dinner party attended by 'all the women in my life' (178). Each woman brings a dish to share that reveals some important aspect of who she is and where she comes from. Because it is a dream, a single facet or quality represents a person; stereotypes are so extreme as to be symbols, 'Jay drags in a whole side of beef and gets a bunch of swaggering whiskey-sipping butch types to help her dig a hole in the backyard. They show off for each other, breaking up stones to line the fire pit' (178). In addition to her past lovers and friends, the author's mother and aunts are in the dream and there are children running around and playing. Everyone is cooking, feeding each other, telling stories and laughing. In the dream, the speaker experiences the fulfilment of the fantasy of home. 'For the first time in my life I am not hungry...[t]he dream goes on and on, and through it all I hug myself and smile' (178).

The dream world is an imagined place, the result of brain activity and experience, of physiology and psychology. The liminality implied by binaries leads to productive creation; their perceived mutual exclusivity is a red herring. Body and mind are integrated moment by moment as the individual makes and remakes her identity, even while she sleeps. A neurobiological theory of dreams propounded by Harvard University psychiatrists James Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley suggests that dreaming is our most creative state, one in which the chaotic, spontaneous recombination of cognitive elements produces novel configurations of information: new ideas. While

many or even most of these ideas may be bizarre, if even a few of its fanciful products are truly useful, our dream time will not have been wasted. Neural plasticity permits any and all images and emotions to emerge in a dream.⁶⁷ By beginning and ending her story with dreams of food, Allison achieves a transformative integration of the discursive body and the hungry body. Using language to fashion a satisfactory as well as satisfying outcome, Allison opens with a dream linked with disappointment and closes with a dream of fulfilment. We are left with the sense that Allison has accomplished her mission: she has used language to construct the concept of change, thereby bringing it into being. Framing the story between dreams means that under these circumstances at least, in the realms of the literary (semantic) and in ‘spontaneous recombination’ (dream images), her hunger is sated.

A hearty appetite is the prerogative of men in southern culture. Because she is already too much body, excessively corporeal in shape--curved hips, thighs, breasts--and in effusions--menstruation, childbirth, lactation, a respectable white, southern woman must deny the flesh in order to tame it. Dorothy Allison rejects the patriarchal denial of appetite satisfaction. She is always hungry and wants to eat as much as she wants of what she wants. An important aspect of southern culture is its distinctive cooking, and most meals that Allison describes that also bring up her associations with home are typical southern recipes. There is an added emotional and psychological component to eating which goes beyond simply fuelling the machine that is the body, and that is the notion that constant hunger, persistent eating even after the physical hunger has been satisfied is the desire to fill a psychic void, to compensate for a lack or an absence. In Allison’s case, this is what her mother did not

⁶⁷ James Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley, ‘The brain as a dream generator: an activation synthesis hypothesis of the dream process’, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 134:12 (Dec. 1977), 1335 – 1348

do to protect and nurture her. The dream at the end of the story pieces together the necessary components for a kind of resolution.

The Womb: Zoë Wicomb's 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town'

While Allison reminisces about how and what her mother fed her, Wicomb's story from the collection of the same name, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, brings up the issue of the physical body in its material environment as a fact of life for women everywhere. Body and food are conflated in woman. In general, that most women become mothers (or did prior to widely available birth control) adds a nurturing dimension to their own physicality; the pregnant woman's body provides sustenance for the foetus floating in her womb and the lactating mother once she has given birth continues to feed the baby from her own body. When the baby is no longer directly dependent on the mother's body, the mother usually provides food for the growing child. Elizabeth Grosz's statement regarding how women have been perceived is apt: 'Women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men' (14). The notion of female excess applies in a variety of ways to the character, Frieda, in the story 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town'. As a pregnant woman, she is too much body, and as a coloured woman she is the embodiment of too many races.

Frieda's circumstances are unique culturally, geographically and personally: she lives in a world where boundaries have been constituted through colonisation, but in a variety of ways she steps over the boundaries into and out of certain realms, away from working class, into academia, between black and white, back and forth, until she is confronted by a one-way threshold. This border is the physical and ethical marker

between life and death. She must determine what to do about the cluster of cells forming the foetus inside her body.

The initial setting of the story is a bus ride to a particular part of Cape Town where she will meet Michael, her white lover, who will drive her to the abortionist's house. The buses are mixed; blacks and coloureds sit at the back of the bus and whites in the front. Sitting in the coloured section, Frieda overhears the conversation between two coloured maids on their way home from work in the suburbs to their own racially segregated township. They talk about their white employers issuing instructions and living well. Wicomb writes back to the injustice of the racist laws, the sexist mores, the power structure that has a white family eat very well and their black servants feel defiantly entitled to take some of the food home to their own hungry children—effectively stealing and defending the action saying, ‘They never notice anyway. There’s so much food in their pantries, in the fridge and on the tables; they don’t know what’s there and what isn’t’ (69). The overworked, underpaid maids’ day-to-day strategy for survival is a function of their material circumstances which, in turn, are a result of their race and gender in postcolonial South Africa. Taking the food is simultaneously an act of resistance as well as a strategy to enhance their bleak lives and enliven themselves and their children with the joy and satisfaction that comes from eating delicious food. Notable is that the recipes the woman on the bus describes are for typical Cape Malay coloured dishes. The bus passenger who refers to herself as ‘cook’, and wishes that cooking was all she had to do, undertakes a sort of cultural culinary infiltration into the kitchen of her wealthy, white employer and feeds her ‘Marram’ and her white family the spicy food of *her* people. She describes her workday: ‘Well there I was on my feet all day starching linen, making roeties and

spiced lentils and sweet potato and all the lekker things you must mos have with cardamom chicken' (68).

Frieda's ticket out of a similar fate as a servant will be her university education and as much autonomy as she can seize for herself given the restrictions imposed on her by apartheid and gender expectations. She is momentarily bewildered when a grumpy passenger hands her the purse which has fallen out of her bag and scornfully tells her she is stupid. The peculiar details of her life's circumstances converge in her consciousness at the moment: 'I have not been alerted to my own stupidity before. No doubt I will sail through my final examinations at the end of this year and still not know how I dared to pluck a fluttering foetus out of my womb. That is if I survive tonight' (73). She is suddenly aware of the gulf between intellectual and experiential knowledge.

The episode on the bus, Frieda's reverie and her eavesdropping, situate her very specifically in a number of categories: coloured, female, working class, yet also not quite squarely in any, since she has stepped out of the state-imposed boundaries by having a sexual relationship with a young white man. In addition, by attending university, she breaks the negative stereotype of the coloured girl destined for menial, subservient status and a life of relative poverty. As far as Wicomb's Frieda is concerned, the racial and social space of coloured South Africans during apartheid is a zone between zones, an in-between space, which strangely defies the rigid categorisation that the system intended to put in place. What happens, in fact, is that coloureds are a different Other from black racial Otherness. If whiteness is absence and blackness is otherness, the coloured belongs nowhere. Because the stuff of which they are made, their very DNA, is drawn from two or more racial categories,

according to Zoë Wicomb ‘there is not an articulation of lack of identity but a shameful excess, an exorbitance of identity’ (1998: 105).

Politically, during the apartheid regime, coloureds had no more rights than blacks and as much reason to resist white supremacist hegemony, to organise and fight back. However, the relative lightness of their skin tone visually aligned coloureds more with the Afrikaans-speaking Boer oppressor than their black forebears, and they were accepted into the predominantly black resistance movements with some scepticism, if at all. In addition, most coloureds speak Afrikaans. The perception has been that coloureds are not real black Africans, and among whites that they are bastards, God’s Step-Children--a term coined by South African writer, Sarah Gertrude Millin and the title of her book of the same name (1924).

Frieda takes nothing for granted and in her observations there is the suggestion of the more integrated and holistic form of understanding that is consistent with the feminist standpoint. She is quite alone, an exile from her own community though still living in it. By falling in love with Michael, the boyish, blond-haired student, she steps quite alone over the threshold, to meet him where their relationship will not be detected. If they are found out, the punishment is likely to come from every level of society: his family, Frieda’s family, their respective communities, the law. In saying ‘for two short years I have adored Michael’, Frieda is acknowledging the risks she has taken and the isolation or exilic nature of that part of her life. That the affair has gone on for two years reinforces for the reader that what the couple has is not a fleeting, meaningless sexual relationship, but something that under normal circumstances in a country other than South Africa, might become a lifelong partnership. She is in no way the ‘typical’ indigenous female victim of sexual exploitation at the hands of the white male settler. To the extent that it may have been possible for Frieda and Michael

to have been equal partners in the context of their love affair, given that it unfolded in South Africa in the last quarter of the twentieth century, there is no evidence of overt domination or subservience. On the other hand, their relationship is highly intensified by their having to meet in secret, making it difficult to ascertain what the course of their love might have been had they not lived in South Africa. By the time she decides to go through with the abortion, however, she knows that Michael is no longer in love with her, and she is no longer in love with him. Her tone is disillusioned, exhausted, no longer willing to fight the reality of their peculiar situation under apartheid, where there has been no opportunity for a love affair like theirs to run its natural course. 'For two years I have loved Michael, have wanted to marry him. Duped by a dream I merely shook my head' (75). She will not buy into his fantasy of their getting married. She will proceed with the abortion in spite of Michael's argument, 'But you love babies, you want babies some time or other, so why not accept God's holy plan?' (75) Lumping God, Michael and her father together, Frieda resists the power that these masculine forces represent: 'for once I do not plead and capitulate; I find it quite easy to ignore these men' (75). It is, after all, her body, her life, her decision, and, ultimately, her conscience.

Early on in 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town' Michael refers to Frieda's handbag that she knows is lined with felt, "It looks cheap, unsightly," and lowering his voice to my look of surprise, "Can't you tell?" But he was speaking of the exterior, the way it looks' (63). So much about the society she lives in is about surfaces and external appearances. She perceives that his implied question is whether she wears this handbag because she is poor and cannot afford something better or if she lacks good taste. The question's subtext may be about race and class. The smaller purse full of money that Michael gives her to pay the abortionist is made of brown leather, an

object of superior quality to her shabby handbag. His having given her the purse is an action fraught with distressing significance. He comes from a well off family, she does not. 'I feel angry with Michael. He has probably never travelled by bus.' For Frieda, the fact of her race is compounded by her economic class and her gender, all intersecting with each other; her point of view, or Wicomb's expressed through Frieda, is an intellectual achievement that reflects political consciousness and a multi-faceted awareness of individuals and dynamics. She experiences the interaction affectively, subjectively, while at the same time assessing the circumstances as if from the perspective of an outside observer.

Wicomb has drawn a character who is unusually self-aware: an intelligent young woman whose outsider status she wears like a mantle drawn about her shoulders, a garment she puts on, rather than something imposed on her by others. This spectator-thinker behaviour adds to her marginalisation. As an outsider within, she has multiple standpoints that inform one another. Certainly being coloured, relatively poor, female, all confer the sense of the marginalised upon a character; in addition, there is something intrinsic to Frieda that presents a kind of self-conscious strength. She is, almost throughout the book, a curious observer of the action that plays out in front of her. Even as a participant, she brings to her interactions the detached sense that she is doubly conscious of what is occurring; evaluating while participating, aware of who wields power.

It is through this lens that the reader has some access to a more objective account of the particular world described by Wicomb's narrator. This perspective offers a fluid and dynamic way of understanding Frieda's world by the end of the story and her acknowledgment of loss followed by relief--that the trains run on a precise schedule, and that is all one can know for sure. Once she wraps up the aborted

foetus in newspaper and drops it into the dustbin, she feels the loss of God followed by the certainty of the 6.22 train: 'I do not know what has happened to God. He is fastidious. He fled at the moment that I smoothed the wet black hair before wrapping it up. I do not think he will come back' (81).

Abortion was illegal during the apartheid years. The white male-dominated postcolonial state, in usurping women's reproductive rights, imposed control over all women. As Frieda is a woman of colour, there is the race-and class-based history of population control abuse of the postcolonial state to bear in mind, too. During this era, familial systems are in most cases controlled by men on the state and household level, among both black and white kinship systems. Michael's urging Frieda not to have the abortion, which he understands as an act of love and support, is just another way in which he is aligned with the dominant forces at work in the state as well as on the level of personal relationships, to subdue dissent. Frieda, however, will not be subdued, even if the procedure does lead her into purgatory.

In terms of her specifically female predicament, that she is pregnant and cannot proceed with the birth of this child, Wicomb's portrayal of the mental anguish Frieda experiences is multi-layered; the physical reality of her situation is not in any obvious way foregrounded, rather it is hinted at. Here is an echo of Judith Butler's notion of the body as it implies mortality, vulnerability, agency; of 'doing' and 'being done to'. Frieda's perspective in this instance is of the subject who is in the throes of anticipating the enormity of what she is about to do, as well as from a slightly more detached place where she is, although the story is written in the present tense, viewing her mental and emotional processes in retrospect. Wicomb accords Frieda the privileged standpoint of a woman who is undergoing an experience, analysing what it might mean. Noticeably absent are descriptions of the body's reaction to an

excruciatingly painful operation performed without anaesthesia. The only suggestion of the immediate physical outcome of the abortion is the brief mention of a sanitary pad. Although the entire experience has everything to do with the body right down to the cellular level, from the initial act of sexual intercourse to the fertilised egg, Wicomb avoids any vivid description of pain, cramps, blood or clumps of tissue as the contents of the womb are expelled. In the telling of Frieda's story, it seems that mind is privileged over matter until the last two sentences where the absence of God is observed in the presence of the strangely tender gesture of smoothing the wet black hair of the newspaper-wrapped foetus.

Frieda has a deep and complicated perspective on her circumstances and ascribes to Michael the desire to abandon her but the inability to do so because it would be cowardly. 'There is a faraway look in his eyes as he plans his retreat. But he is well brought up, honourable', he will accept his responsibility in her pregnancy and offer to do the right thing. Although generations away from being a settler, Michael aligns himself with the possibility of return to the metropolis when he speaks of their emigrating to England.

Frieda seems surprised at her Miss Havisham-like vision of moths eating her imagined wedding dress, and the intensity and complexity of the vision is so symbolic as to defy verbal explanation, yet ultimately the symbol is Wicomb's verbal construction. Her much earlier fantasy had been of marrying Michael. Now she knows it can never be, not even in England. 'I would have explained if I could. But I could not account for this vision: the slow shower of ashes over yards of diaphanous tulle, the moth wings tucked back with delight as their tongues whisked the froth of white lace' (74-75). The heterosexual normative pattern that prevailed in postcolonial or western-influenced cultures in the 1960s, when this story is set, was for a young

man and a young woman to meet, fall in love, whatever that may have meant, perhaps attraction, lust, conditioned by popular culture including the music, books and films of the era, have a white wedding presided over by a clergyman, a celebratory reception, and then a life of work governed by sexual division of labour and the production of children. That this story is set during a time when this ethos prevails, and that Frieda's dream of the wedding dress disintegrates at the moment she completely understands that she must go through with the abortion, heaps layer upon layer of ethical, racial and gender significance on that realisation. At dawn the day after the procedure, the baby is dead and disposed of, and Michael is out of the picture. God has left, and Frieda is all alone. The title of the story is disproved: you can actually get lost in Cape Town.

Given the right circumstances, the fertilised egg becomes the body and once born and experiencing life, the human body houses everything within and beyond itself; it acts, reacts and adapts. In this chapter I have interrogated the convergences and dissonances between intellectual and experiential knowledge showing that while the individual is not only his or her physical, material body, far from it, the body is the starting point from which all else originates and evolves. It becomes almost impossible to talk about the body without also addressing subjectivity and the self. I will do this in the third and final chapter which will focus on situated subjectivity. Body and identity are interwoven, so there is a strong likelihood that body will make its way back into the conversation. The body remains a site within which the particularity of culture and politics cannot be evaded.

Chapter Three

The State of the Exile: Situated Subjectivity

‘...in fact, as a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world’.

Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

‘The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another’.

Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*.

‘In reality, who am I?’ (Frantz Fanon)

It is a logical progression to move from talking about body in the previous chapter to talking about identity in this one; body and identity are always already intertwined. The ‘who’ and the ‘I’ of Fanon’s question above refer to the multiply constituted self. As reflexive beings, our consciousness of our own identity is what we refer to as the self. This identity-consciousness is not necessarily fixed or coherent, but is an awareness from time to time of a self that recognizes itself. Mind and matter, affect and materiality, transpire simultaneously. That simultaneity includes the intersectionality of a long list of factors: place, race, gender, sexuality, health, class and religion in the context of the circumstances of an individual’s life. These comprise her situated subjectivity. In this chapter, I interrogate various forms of belonging, exile and nomadism. Once the theoretical framework has been established,

the main focus will be on identity as situated subjectivity, especially the relationship between identity and exile, in the work of Zoë Wicomb and Dorothy Allison.

Identity, the public aspect of the self, and subjectivity, the private, are processes affected by influences from macrocosmic to microcosmic levels, from transnational to local sociocultural constructions to intracellular activity. *Where* this process occurs is significant, thus place for the real person and setting for the fictional character are also key determinants of identity. Identity is constituted at the intersection between nature and culture. One's notion of identity depends on one's perspective on philosophy of mind, and, to return to Fanon, is complicated by the postcolonial condition. Gina Wisker aptly encapsulates the postcolonial imaginary when she writes that '[l]ocation as a notion and a phenomenographical whole is much richer merely than that of the cultural, historical and geographical context of writing and reading, which it includes. Location and the "loci of enunciation" are the places or contexts from which we experience and speak' (2000: 7-8). Diasporic writing invites the interrogation of identity and the ways in which it is shaped by lived experience, memory and imagination associated with at least two distinct places which can be thought of as home and away.

There are shared processes that nations and individuals undergo, between what we might call social identity and self identity (subjectivity), and both have to do with the endless permutations of race, gender and class issues, among others. The project of postcolonial feminism, as it pertains to individuals and groups, is to unsettle imperialist rigidity, thus it facilitates the transcending or transgressing of borders. To an extent, transnational globalisation can be seen as the next iteration of colonisation and the imposition of values external to the culture of the people being (re)colonised. A problem with globalisation is that it seeks to erase difference and replace it with a

worldwide culture of western-style capitalism, often masquerading as democracy.

This neoliberalism can engender humanitarian and ecological crises; however, an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this study.⁶⁸

Transnationalism is concerned with power and disempowerment worldwide, with the influence of the centre or majority on the margins or minority; however, whereas mainstream postcolonial theory offers up binaries that suggest either/or scenarios, here/there extremes, and centre/margin polarities, another way of understanding transnationalism is transversally, as an option that encourages a range of possibilities across a spectrum and a mobility of categories. Minority groups, we now recognise, need not dilute their uniqueness in order to gain a political foothold alongside the dominant culture. Lionnet and Shih (2005) offer the model of lateral, cooperative relations among minority groups instead of the vertical hierarchy where the dominant power prescribes/proscribes for those groups and individuals who are lower on the ladder. Fringe groups (minorities) can, in fact, prevail and maintain their identities by sharing strategies and supporting each other in a process similar to how one single person may consider herself, under certain circumstances, to identify with a group, to be part of it, without having her sense of self subsumed by the group; she may also feel herself to be part of, though perhaps not exclusively or permanently ‘belonging to’ more than one group⁶⁹. This approach allows for individuality within community and problematises empowering and disempowering notions of community; it has to do with forms of belonging without recourse to an idea of

⁶⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) writes in her chapter ‘Human/Women’s Rights and Feminist Transversal Politics’ in *Global Feminism* about overcoming global neoliberalisms and universalistic fundamentalisms by adopting what Guattari (1974) first termed ‘transversalism’ in which there is a constant flow of communication both horizontally and vertically. Yuval-Davis writes ‘Transversal politics is based, first, on a dialogical standpoint epistemology (Harding 1991; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002), a recognition that from each positioning the world is seen differently, and thus any knowledge based on just one positioning is “unfinished”’ (281).

⁶⁹ Lionnet and Shih call this form of collaboration across borders minor transnationalism and their approach is from a feminist perspective.

common, shared, or even hybrid identity⁷⁰. Considerations of the self being, becoming and belonging are crucial to discussions of minor transnationalism. The literary implications of these factors become apparent in the close readings of novels and stories later in this chapter.

The ‘trans’ of transnationalism refers to the exchange of ideas and energy across time and space, while the ‘post’ of postcolonialism suggests a chronological step forward, a phase that occurs as the result of something having happened. Minor transnationalism (Lionnet and Shih) linked with transversalism (Yuval-Davis) allows for far more flexibility in terms of the flow of ideas. As a creative, theoretical concept for thinking about literature, individual identity formation, and political movements, the fluid nature of transnationalism is certainly worth interrogating in terms of individuals, not just groups or nations. What I have described above is the public face of identity, the relationship between individual and community, thus privileging historical/political readings. Identity’s private face has to do with subjectivity, foregrounding issues of voice and narrative perspective.

Sonia Kruks theorises what she calls a ‘*sentient* subject’ as the focus of conversations about subjectivity and social processes. She cautions against a wholly postmodern approach to subjectivity which might preclude taking into account lived experience and visible identities such as race and gender. Kruks writes that ‘a sentient subject allows us to rethink a range of questions: about volition, knowing, acting; about relations with others; and about how differently sexed and raced (and aged and enabled) bodies imbue subjectivity differentially ... it also calls for an account of the subject which acknowledges that it exceeds the boundaries of the discursive’ (Kruks

⁷⁰ From Rosalyn Diprose’s article “Where’ your people from, girl?”: Belonging to Race, Gender, and Place Beneath Clouds in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Fall 2008, Vol.19 Issue 3. The first sentence of the abstract reads, ‘This article explores the impossibility and necessity of belonging to gender, race, and place’.

2001: 13). This approach provides a useful lens through which to view characterisation and identity in the work to be analysed in this chapter.

The interrelationship of self and home

Certainly, leaving one home for another under almost any circumstances, trying or joyful, will have an effect on identity formation and the changing sense of self. Terminology provides clues as to the circumstances of this leave-taking, so that words like ‘exile’, ‘migrant’ and ‘nomad’ are weighed down with significance. Rosi Braidotti disagrees with Seyla Benhabib’s characterisation of a disempowered, marginalised exile but prefers an ‘active nomadism’ (1994: 32). The exercise of agency is a crucial component to the survival and the identity of the person who leaves her home or abandons counterproductive habits of thought. Braidotti’s insistence on the nomad as proactive rather than passive is somewhat unrealistic given the real vicissitudes of life and its written representation in fiction. For some people, it is their awareness of their own marginality that encourages their pursuit of active nomadism. Overall, though, Braidotti and others, like Rosemary Hennessy, make a strong case for the value of thinking about what we know and how we know, theory, in other words, as a necessary precursor to action and activism. We must consider the relationship between intellectual and experiential knowledge. Theory can be the catalyst for social change and justice.

To return to the concept of identity, the self in the context of social interaction, and to subjectivity, that which provides the conditions for selfhood, I refer to Sonja Lehmann⁷¹. Lehmann spells out three ‘key uses’ of identity (per Brubaker and Cooper) that apply to the problematic formations of transnational identities:

⁷¹ Lehmann cites the article by Brubaker and Cooper, ‘Beyond ‘identity’ published in *Theory and Society* 29: 2000.

First, understood as a collective phenomenon, “identity” denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category, especially in the literature on social movements; on gender, race, ethnicity and nationalism. Secondly, understood as a core aspect of (individual or collective) “selfhood” or as a fundamental condition of social being, “identity” is invoked to point to something allegedly deep, basic, abiding, or foundational. Lastly, understood as the evanescent product of multiple and competing discourses, “identity” is invoked to highlight the unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary “self.” This is often found in the literature influenced by Foucault, post-structuralism and post-modernism.

Transnational identities are doubly defined by the imprint made on the individual by the nation-state and by the fact that the individual leaves one nation-state—the starting point of her migration—for another. The exile is formed initially by her place of origin and by the process of moving away. This deterritorialization and reterritorialization may be literal or figurative or both.

People cross borders for many different reasons, their numbers and motivations for migrating have changed significantly over the last century. We tend to assume that the nomad or traveller chooses her route while the exile or migrant (usually a labourer) does not have much choice. Alice Walker criticized Woolf for her statement ‘...as a woman, my country is the whole world’ (1938) because she saw her as speaking from a privileged position in respect to both race and class, implying that Woolf had choices. Today, however, Woolf’s statement can be read as a way of problematising questions of belonging and national identity for a woman. While the injustice of racially-motivated stereotyping and silencing of the other was raised in writings by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and other first wave, male postcolonial theorists, the circumstances of colonised women were hardly referenced. Those postcolonialists held up the male as the norm, but for feminist theorists like Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty and Rosi Braidotti, gender difference is key and can shed light on all forms of othering. They introduce postcolonial thinking into

feminist theory and vice versa, and provide movable foundations for a post-humanist view of subjectivity. The self is strengthened through connections to the world.

Woolf's statement introduces the theme of exile as paradigmatic of the female condition (Braidotti 1994: 21). All women are equal in being country-less, home-less. According to Braidotti, our collective identity as a gender rests on the lowest common denominator among us, on our not having a national tie. Braidotti's work traces an intellectual itinerary reflecting the existential situation of a multicultural individual—a migrant who turned nomad and introduces the notion of nomadic identity. She conceptualizes nomadic consciousness as a primarily epistemological position and stresses the difficulty of defining the nomad who 'is usually beyond classification, a sort of classless unit' (1994: 22). In addition, she describes nomadic consciousness as 'a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity' (23). Invoking the Deleuzian rhizome, Braidotti and Lionnet and Shih use the analogy of this twisting, non-linear root structure to illustrate unexpected lateral connections--what Yuval-Davis would call transversal--that occur between individuals, groups and ideas.

We are human beings in the world and to exist is to co-exist.

If we were to set aside intersectionality for a moment and categorise human composition as we first see 'it' as visual identity, what might one notice first? Sex or gender, perhaps, or race; however, Judith Butler critiques the notion of fixed gender identities rooted in nature or bodies. She argues:

If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and

cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.
(1990: 3)

However, most people persist in first taking note of gender as a kind of short cut to hastily typing the other. Just as with the myth of a 'truth' of identity, especially that of binary gender identity, there exists the myth of the one crucial place that most comprehensively determines identity, usually the origin, birthplace or home. Certainly we can agree that although the original home is significant, there is not just one single place that can be linked to a person's composite emerging identity, rather a series of places as well as the process of transit between them. Home(s), however, is a good benchmark to use in assessing identity development over the course of a real life or a fictional characterisation.

It is important to explore what 'home' might mean in order to try and appreciate what 'away' means for the writer and the evolution of her identity. This will have an effect on how and what she writes as an exile. Home here does not refer only to ownership of property or to a single, fixed place, but to a source of connection with others (Willett 2001). The writers in my study all need to leave home for their own reasons: an exilic consciousness informs their work and each writer manifests at times as a traveller, a nomad or an exile. Since the formation of identity is an ongoing process, refusing the norm as well as literally leaving home can be seen as part of the process of individuation.

We may think of the traveller, particularly the artist-traveller, as a privileged person free of constraints who moves about for pleasure or for her own edification. We may think of the nomad as having cultural or tribal patterns of movement dictated by a traditional way of life, although, interestingly, Braidotti portrays her nomad as anti-traditional, a breaker of constraining bonds. We may view the exile as leaving the place of origin in order to secure physical and spiritual survival, making exile a

state which implies compulsion rather than choice. All of the writers in my thesis in all of their circumstances are compelled to move away from the original home and thus are exiles. Long before they actually leave home they experience an internal exile, a kind of dissociation, by not feeling at home within their bodies or communities; this certainly affects their perceptions of their own identities. As Caren Kaplan puts it, 'We must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often sites of racism, sexism and other damaging social practices. Where we come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new' (1987: 194). Thus optimism and creativity can emerge from the ruins.

Apartheid was materially and psychically destructive to Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb, while family violence brutalised Dorothy Allison. Only Carson McCullers is, arguably, not putting herself in (physical) harm's way if she chooses to stay in Columbus, Georgia, but she has asserted that her creativity could not have flourished had she not moved away to study writing in New York, become part of an artists' commune and travelled overseas on a number of occasions. Interestingly, though, the physical damage that she did suffer from came from within her own body; she had rheumatic fever as a child and numerous strokes as a young woman. Leaving her original home did not mean that she could leave the threat of bodily harm behind her, but leaving certainly freed her to explore her own flexible sexuality and her creativity.

Clearly, the co-creative environments of the inside (DNA, heredity) and the outside constitute the individual, and, therefore, her identity. The individual's original or early family unit is a component of the society in which she lives and is her first exposure to social rules and interaction. The family biography and the idea of home

are extremely important to the formation of a sense of self. The four writers in this thesis all write back to the constraints of home and the bonds--both connecting and restrictive--of gender, race and class. Reading them (their biographical identities, as well as their work) through the lens of nomadic transnational feminism reveals how their work and writing lives problematise the categories of gender, race and class across the generations that they span.

The family home, that is, place or setting, whether a mud hut in rural Botswana or a flat in a high-rise in Glasgow, is filled with significance for the formation of identity. Home is the physical and imaginary backdrop against which the becoming person or literary character performs herself. Performativity may be a useful model for identity, even identity in flux, since it is comprised of tensions between 'the power we promote and the power we oppose' (Butler 1993: 241). According to Butler's theory, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until they become internalized as lived subjectivity. For the nomadic subversive writer and character, negotiating power structures and opposing hegemonic norms is something that she does which is part of who she is. Where this occurs is significant. It is interesting to reflect on home as a metaphor for identity as well as a literal place of formation, and it is necessary to examine the critiques and defences of home, particularly in the essay 'What's Home Got to do With It?' by Chandra Mohanty with Biddy Martin (2003: 85-105). The notion of home for the writers in this study is multiply inflected; imagined as a bounded space, home is alternately secure or confining; seen from the vantage point of its boundaries having dissolved, home can be a space of freedom or chaos. Before addressing departure from the original home and the question of exile in relation to identity, it is useful to imagine a snapshot of the writer prior to her actual departure into geographic exile. The writer's place of origin

provides rich material and is often more accessible after she has left. Time and distance can allow for a changing and changed perspective. Interestingly, long after leaving, Bessie Head and Zoë Wicomb are considered South African authors and Carson McCullers and Dorothy Allison are called southern writers. A crucial aspect of identity formation has to do with the tensions between home and away.

Zoë Wicomb's early life in Namaqualand is echoed through her novels and short stories in the form of physical descriptions of the harsh landscape and close, complicated relationships among extended coloured families. Although she has lived out of South Africa for decades, the reader hears in her work Wicomb's comfort and familiarity with coloured dialect, Afrikaans words, idioms and intonation--the language of her original home. Dorothy Allison also, though long gone from South Carolina, accurately renders lilting southern speech patterns and idioms. When she is homesick, she describes the taste of the food of her childhood, yet home is especially problematic for her. The earliest sensations and emotions experienced by these writers form a kind of foundation upon which subsequent identifications⁷² and creative expression are layered. The speculative nature of identity and its contributing factors is so nuanced that definitions are impossible. Identity/subjectivity complicated by internal and external exile is even more fascinating, and, perhaps, more elusive.

In literature, the first person pronoun variously refers to the narrator or speaker, or to the author of autobiography. 'I' refers to the literary creation, narrator or character, constituted by words and has been thoroughly explored in Chapter One. It is challenging enough to try and discuss the location of and prerequisites for identity in terms of a flesh and blood, thinking, acting human being; it is more difficult to take the conversation one step further to analyse a fictional character and her identity,

while always conscious of her absolutely discursive constructedness. For the most part, in the case of realist prose at least, we tacitly agree to deal with these words on a page as if they were signifiers of real people, minds and bodies, with some elusive yet extraordinarily important clusters of characteristics called identities. In *David's Story*, Zoë Wicomb emphasizes the unknowableness of a truth of identity and the unreliability of a first person narrator when she has the amanuensis introduce 'what is and is not David's story' (2000: 1) in the Preface to the novel. The metafictional and postmodern qualities of the novel problematise representations of identity even further. David and his wife Sally are coloured anti-apartheid activists whose mixed race means that they are not fully accepted by the predominantly black ANC. This raises questions about identity politics and belonging. Wicomb poses myriad questions: who is writing David's story? Who is David? An overarching question is, what is coloured identity if it can be said to exist? These questions are a kind of postmodern exercise in nomadic consciousness-raising. And most mysterious of all, who is Dulcie, the woman with whom David is in love? In her afterword to the novel, Dorothy Driver writes, 'Dulcie represents a kind of flux and flexibility that both represents the chaotic act of writing and charts the contradictions and difficulties of her representation. Of course, Dulcie is very much herself, too...' (252). The ramifications of this postmodern strategy are perfectly suited to the subject matter of the novel which deals with the death throes of the totalitarian apartheid regime during which government propaganda, in effect official lies, were broadcast as truth and no-one knew whom to trust. The inherent warning in the novel is that the dismantling of the reign of terror and deceit may be happening by those same means; the ANC uses a network of informants and punishes collaborators with torture or execution. This

⁷² I use 'identification' in the sense of a process whereby one accepts the values of a social group or ascribes to oneself the qualities of another person. To problematise this process I also consider the later

mirrors the activities of the apartheid regime. A semantic illustration of this state of affairs is to interrogate the terms ‘terrorist’ and ‘freedom fighter’. In other words, if the narrator is unreliable, whose story ought one to believe?

Wicomb employs metafictionality again in her 2006 novel *Playing in the Light* in order to disrupt notions of what we assume we know about ourselves and our families’ stories. Circumstances unique to apartheid-era South Africa provided the conditions for racial classifications that would set the course for a person’s lived experience depending on her perceived race. Characterised by her difference, how then does the individual find herself in or part of a community? How does a person maintain her integrity and still belong to any group?⁷³ The maintenance of that integrity is a similar process to the achievement of identity and this allows her to be herself while being part of a group or a series of groups depending on how she is identifying herself at any given moment. Marion Campbell, the protagonist of *Playing in the Light*, is called upon to make massive adjustments to who she thought she was when she discovers that her parents had been passing for white when they were actually coloured. She was raised believing she was white. Her coloured young friend and employee, Brenda, finds out from Marion’s aged father while Marion is overseas, that he and his late wife had decided to ‘play white’. Brenda announces to Marion on her return that she knows ‘that your father’s was the story that I wanted to write, the story that should be written’ (217). Wicomb weaves in the metafictionality that calls into question the truth of any story, and, therefore, the fluctuating nature of identity. Marion’s response to Brenda is ‘How dare you! Why don’t you write your own fucking story? ... That’s enough. Get out. I know my father’s fucking story.’

emergence of disidentification as a disruptive, nomadic possibility.

⁷³ Sara Ahmed (1998) addresses the issue of the individual as part of a movement. She writes that in the alignment of the ‘we’ with the ‘I’, the feminist collective with the feminist subject, an imperfect yet generative ‘grammar of social existence might yet be possible’ (qtd. in Eagleton 252)

‘Actually, Brenda says, I suspect you don’t’ (217-218).

The novel ends with Marion ejecting Brenda from her flat and shutting the door on her.

The unspoken struggle for Marion is about identity and belonging as a woman of mixed race, formerly not classified as such, in post-apartheid South Africa where racial classification is supposed to have disappeared, at least constitutionally. All of her points of reference have shifted.

According to Maria Martinez Gonzalez (2008) the island metaphor is an excellent illustration of what identity is not; it is not fixed or permanent with a constant centre and the presence of the sea all around it marking its borders, its beginning and end, its separateness. She prefers the metaphor of the archipelago, but that is too close to the island concept which she has already convinced the reader is a fallacy. Gonzalez does refer to Iris Marion Young’s metaphor of the city, which is quite an appealing analogy. The city (identity) is inclusive, dynamic, never monotonous, it offers places for community interaction but no coercion to political solidarity or representativity—unless that is what you choose. There are no actual, physical borders between neighbourhoods. The character of a place may be clearly identifiable or categorizable at its centre, but becomes diluted as one moves away from that centre. What was the apparently distinct nature of the first neighbourhood begins to blend with the character of the next place over, takes on some of those aspects and then, approaching some sort of new centre, intensifies. In a similar way to the interconnected parts of a city, then, individual identity can be seen to be composed of modes of multiple being. On another level, the city metaphor nicely weaves together the notions of place and identity, the very idea being interrogated in this thesis.

Gonzalez cites Braidotti's concept of nomadism which originates with Deleuze as a metaphor for identity. In 'Nomadism with a difference: Deleuze's legacy in a feminist perspective' (1996), Braidotti lays out aspects of Deleuzian theory that have a place in her approach to the question of identity. What is interesting to Braidotti is the Deleuzian notion that the masculine coincides with the fixity of the centre which in Western philosophy is represented through the notion of Being, which is opposed to the process of becoming, a realm associated more with women. Being and Becoming lie on a continuum rather than constituting fixed, essentialised binaries, one masculine, the other feminine; this, to paraphrase Braidotti, allows for engendering creative differences. Nomadism permits the fluid boundaries that Deleuze associates with women and that I argue should be associated with everyone. This may be especially apt for Dorothy Allison, whose nomadism has to do with her lesbianism and feminist activism as the subversion of compulsory heteronormativity. She is nomadic in her refusal to be stereotyped within and by the lesbian community. Zoë Wicomb's nomadism has to do with her subversion of expectations for her race and sex. She is a South African woman of mixed race who shatters the stereotype by pursuing a higher education, being active in the anti-apartheid movement, emigrating, writing and publishing, and teaching at university. While Carson McCullers and Bessie Head can also be seen as nomadic, path-breaking, risk-taking women writers of their time who create new variations within existing literary forms, it is the younger generation of writers, Allison and Wicomb, who will be foregrounded in this chapter.

The question running through all of these speculations about how best to characterize identity is: (how) can identity be expressed in language? It is especially interesting to examine the narrative construction of a young character who is in a liminal phase, either on the brink of puberty or in adolescence, already approaching

adulthood. Dorothy Allison's story 'Gospel Song' (2002) is narrated by an unnamed child, and is rich in themes to do with race, gender, class and place as they affect the development of identity. In *Cavedweller* (1998), Allison traces the unfolding of the character Cissy from childhood through adolescence. Elsie, in Zoë Wicomb's short story 'Nothing Like the Wind' (2008) is a teenage high school pupil affectively straddling the old world of her former homeland and a new world as an exile. In exploring the narrative construction of fictional characters who are children, there are abundant opportunities for demonstrating the fluctuating nature of identity, nomadism and exilic consciousness. In addition to analysing the growing up of fictional characters in this chapter, adult identity in Wicomb's 'There's the Bird that Never Flew' (2008) is intriguingly drawn as a process.

Bone in 'Gospel Song'

The nameless protagonist in Dorothy Allison's short story 'Gospel Song' is chronologically just a child, but in terms of her psychic and intellectual standpoint, she seems quite a further along on the spectrum of maturity; one cannot really pin her down. Moving between genres, Allison has crafted an excerpt from her autobiographical novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and rendered it 'Gospel Song'. The short story appears in the collection *Trash* (2002). In the short story, the narrative voice of the nine year old we know from the novel to be Bone (Ruth Anne Boatright) is strong and self-aware. 'Bone's identity is not locked within her waiting to be discovered. Instead, it is created, fluid, plural. Consequently, Bone must accept the ongoing burden of generating identities/stories for herself. In a postmodern world view, identity is actually *more* significant because it is generated and accepted by the subject...' (King 2000: 126). Dorothy Allison's story opens: 'At nine, I knew exactly who and what I wanted to be ... I wanted to be a gospel singer and be loved by the

whole wide world (2002: 49). This young protagonist is so beset by physical and existential threats that she knows enough to see that garnering the love of the world would be a protective force strong enough to keep her safe. She prays for a beautiful singing voice that will transform her difficult life. This early acknowledgment of ‘who and what [she] wanted to be’ opens up the space for the fluidity of identity and the process of the ongoing emergence of identity over the course of a life.

The frame of the short story version provides some context, but not the same extensive back story offered by the novel. In both, though, the setting is the rural south, mostly Greenville, South Carolina, but with side trips to neighbouring southern states on the Baptist gospel music circuit. The Southern Baptist Church is an interesting postcolonial phenomenon that provides southern writers with a wealth of material, ranging from colourful characters to opportunities to grapple with issues of irony and hypocrisy in human behaviour, especially regarding religious attitudes to racism, sexism, piety and sin. Dorothy Allison uses these influences to create her nomadic main character, Bone, who pushes back against the sociocultural constraints and specific life circumstances that could otherwise seriously restrict and harm her.

Early Baptists who came to the American colonies from England struggled to gain a foothold in the south until they stopped challenging the gentry on slavery and began to claim that the Bible supported its practice.⁷⁴ The consequences of the Southern Baptists’ decision to separate from other Baptists in defence of white supremacy and the institution of slavery have been long lived. Slavery has long since been abolished, but other inequities persist. In terms of gender roles and sexuality,

⁷⁴ Interestingly, pro-apartheid members of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, made similar biblical claims to justify apartheid. According to Robert Ross’s *A Concise History of South Africa*, D. F. Malan, the first apartheid era Prime Minister (1948) believed that white Afrikaner nationalism was ordained by God. This echoes the then Dutch Reformed Church’s literal acceptance of the Old Testament story of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth as evidence that the darker races were created to serve.

homosexuality is still considered an abomination, and in marriage, the wife is still required to submit to the will of her husband who is deemed her master. Bone is a renegade, nomadic female character who refuses victimisation by denying repressive religious doctrines which are at odds with her sense of self-determination and truth. She, like Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*, is inwardly exilic and liminal, but outwardly forthright and outspoken in the way that prepubertal girls are permitted to be before society attempts to mould them into southern ladies partly by silencing them.

Allison's 'Gospel Song' invites critical reading that accepts ambiguity, opening up new discursive spaces for the reading of identity as multiple and sometimes contradictory. Although body and identity looked at over time are always evolving, they are presented in this story as the small chunk of a child's life frozen in time and expressed in words as necessitated by narrative strategy. The excerpted story's time frame covers a few days, unlike the novel from which it is drawn, which offers a more expansive look over a longer period of time at Bone's physical body, identity and subjectivity as fluctuating and nomadic.

In both the short story and the novel, as in Allison's own lived experience and in the created, verbal product which are her stories, hunger, poverty and violence are conditions of life about which there is little she can do, and they are always associated with home as the complicated site of comfort and pain, the starting point of identity formation. Because she is a child, the protagonist is at the mercy of the Pearls, her school friend Shannon's parents, and must rely on their generosity when she travels with them. 'I was still hungry. Mrs. Pearl had packed less food than usual, and Mama had told me always to leave something on my plate when I ate with Shannon. I wasn't supposed to make them think that they had to feed me' (59). Without sufficient

nutritious food, a child will be malnourished and can become sick; it is, of course, possible to die of hunger, although that was unlikely in Bone's case because for all her mother's other inconsistencies, she makes sure that her children eat, if only just enough to survive. What is materially real for Bone, however, is the sensation of hunger as pain. Yet with social and cultural behaviours associated with eating and the judgment around taking charity in the form of food from others, she is compelled to endure the pangs in order to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Bone's hunger is certainly physical, rooted in material bodily reality and lack, but it is also psychic, an exilic consciousness of liminality, of something unsatisfied. These experiences will go some way towards her identity formation. Bone may be perceived as fitting squarely into the categories of female, white, poor, child, victim, yet not quite belonging anywhere in particular, either, due to her perspicacity, and, as we discover in other stories, her sexual orientation. She is different because she knows she is different, and here the discursivity of identity is key.

In 'Gospel Song' Allison paints a carnivalesque picture of hypocritical characters at Baptist tent revivals professing to be Christians, drunk and lustful, wearing flashy stage attire and singing about redemption. Bone sees the sleaziness for what it is, yet still yearns for 'people to moan when they heard the throb in my voice when I sang of the miracle in my life' (49). Interestingly, she privileges the mode of expression rather than the 'story' of which she sings because it is the story of her life which she undervalues. She is an intellectually precocious child who lives on the fringes of society: she is the illegitimate child of a very poor mother and a violent, sexually abusive stepfather. She knows herself to be considered white trash, from a long line of poor whites. Still, with the magical thinking characteristic of a child, she prays for a miracle and expects, up to a point, to have her prayers answered. Here, she

recalls Frankie in McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* whose utopian fantasy, not quite a prayer, allows people to choose to switch back and forth between being male and female. For both characters, the fulfilment of their wishes would ease their paths to becoming more authentically the people they sense they are but fear they can never be. They must risk the physical exile of leaving home and take the nomadic leap of moving beyond rigid cultural norms to move towards fulfilment.

In her introduction to *Trash*, Allison writes about the polar opposites: good poor and bad poor. 'We were the bad poor. We were men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours and bearing too many children; and children with runny noses, watery eyes, and the wrong attitudes... we were not noble, not grateful, not even hopeful. We knew ourselves despised' (vii). This knowledge informs Bone's narration of 'Gospel Song' and reveals the complex identifications operating as a result. The way that the introduction is worded makes identity sound fixed and finite when it is a label imposed by someone other than the subject herself. Certainly, definite sociocultural factors play an important part in influencing the course of identity development, but just as biology need not determine destiny, neither should material circumstances be seen to delimit the possibilities of identity flux. Bone's awareness and experience of poverty, the gendered division of labour, and the consciousness of race in the south come with their own set of expectations. Families that have been for many generations considered poor whites in the south, in Appalachia especially, are often descended from sharecroppers and tenant farmers who never owned their own farms. After emancipation, just having a white skin accorded them no special privilege on the labour market any more, but still, many persisted in clinging to the myth that their whiteness alone placed them higher than

African Americans in their imagined social hierarchy. Thus in terms of identity and identifications, whiteness is not the absence of race, it is a category brimming with significance, especially when complicated by poverty. Bone seems to understand on some level the variety of reasons for her marginalized status even if she does not comprehend the history and sociology behind it. An adequate exploration of Bone's characterization must take into account her negotiation of her experience and identity, allowing for multiple figurations of herself.

A kind of hyperawareness emerges in the character of Bone. Allison's characterization of this child suggests that she is already beginning to grow into a spectator-thinker or detached participant. Bone's perspective influences how she constructs her world. It is through this lens that the reader has some access to a more objective account of the particular world that is Bone's lived experience within her idiosyncratic family and the larger white, southern Baptist culture. She is a lonely child, an outsider or exile, who craves the acceptance that seems to be made possible by inclusion in a church congregation. Hymn singing unites separate individuals and Bone finds the music uplifting. Ironically, however, she is not seeking the community of feeling by singing as part of a choir; Bone actually wants to continue her outsider status by having the most beautiful singing voice of all, to sing solo.

Abandonment by God is enormously significant to Bone in 'Gospel Song'. It is at this point in the story, when Bone feels rebuffed by Jesus in her prayer for a gospel singing voice, that she befriends Shannon Pearl. Just prior to their meeting she describes her feelings regarding her inability to sing and the fact that it was the most important request she had ever made of God: 'It was an injustice I could not understand or forgive. It left me with a wild aching hunger in my heart and a deep resentment I hid from everyone but God' (50). The shocking depth of this girl's anger

reveals the extent of her isolation, her psychic exile. Bone recognizes something of herself in Shannon, 'My friend Shannon Pearl had the same glint of hunger in her watery pink eyes', and the hunger is a metaphysical lack, an absence which also manifests as anger (50). When Shannon walks the length of the school bus aisle and the children pretend that there are no empty seats next to them or call out 'Cootie Train', Bone notices that '[t]here was fire in those pink eyes, a deep fire I recognized, banked and raging. Before I knew it I was on my feet and leaning forward to catch her arm. I pulled her into our row without a word' (51).

Shannon is an astonishingly ugly albino girl; short and fat with white, perpetually sweaty skin, wispy white hair, and 'fine blue blood vessels showing against the ivory of her scalp'. Bone alternates between seeing her friend as 'strangely beautiful' and, more often, as 'wholly monstrous'. Surprisingly reflexively and analytically for a child, the protagonist muses:

There had to be something wrong with me I was sure, the way I went from awe to disgust where Shannon was concerned. When Shannon sat between her mama's legs or chewed licorice strings her daddy held out for her, I purely hated her. But when other people would look at her hatefully or the boys up at Lee Highway would call her 'Lard Eyes,' I felt a fierce and protective love for her as if she were more my sister than Reese. I felt as if I belonged to her in a funny kind of way, as if her 'affliction' put me deeply in her debt. (50)

In her creation of Shannon, Allison continues the tradition of southern gothic writers' obsession with freaks and the grotesque, people who are immediately visually noticeable as other or marginal. Characters with abnormalities often signpost the aberrance of the society in which they live, like literal representations, not too different from personifications in medieval morality plays. Shannon's horrible stories about the gruesome deaths of innocent children compound the aura of gothic horror that surrounds her: 'She loved best little children who had fallen in the way of large machines', and smiling smugly, she would go into gory detail.

From her exilic standpoint as an outsider within, Bone is acutely sensitive to the plight of other outsiders, and because she is insightful, comes to realize that ‘Shannon Pearl simply and completely hated everyone who had ever hurt her, and spent most of her time brooding on punishments either she or God would visit on them. The fire that had burned in her eyes was the fire of outrage’ (55). The reality of who Shannon is dawns on Bone who initially ‘had the idea that because she was so ugly on the outside, it was only reasonable that Shannon would turn out to be saintlike when you got to know her’ (54). The idea that one can actually access the truth or reality of who someone is or that one person can get to know another is not necessarily incompatible with the theory that identity is multiple, conflicting and always in flux. Bone thinks she knows something of who Shannon is, and, in fact, she does. The reader, also, may know something of who Bone is because of Allison’s skill at her craft.

‘Gospel Song’ is full of biblical allusions. The title makes this immediately evident, as does Bone’s emotional reaction to beautifully sung hymns and popular gospel music – she is moved by the spirit and feels a religious transformation wash, temporarily, over her, ‘I started hiccupping and crying. “I’m sorry, Jesus. I’m sorry”’ (56). The girls’ strange friendship is characterized by religious hypocrisy and veiled evil, and, in fact, the entire gospel music circuit, ostensibly created to praise God and lift the spirits of the audience, is a sham. Shannon is ironically portrayed as Christlike early on, before Bone knows her better. Dorothy Allison plays with the myth of a fixed identity or a knowable character by highlighting different aspects of Shannon’s contradictory nature at different times. Purity and innocence are suggested by the whiteness and luminosity of her skin and hair. Even her surname evokes the image of beauty and rarity: a perfect, opalescent gem; a hint at the parable of the pearl

of great price. Shannon suffers, but not for others. Her mother, Roseanne Pearl, refers to her as ‘my little angel’ and ‘miracle child’ and in so doing demonstrates, according to Bone, a lesson in the power of love. Bone is consumed with jealousy of the love and attention showered on Shannon by her parents. Shannon, however, is brimming with hate.

Shannon hates how she looks as it has causes her to be stared at, ostracized and called awful names all her life. Throughout the novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, there are chilling examples of how name-calling can damage the psyche. Bone is well aware of this, both as a victim and a perpetrator. In the short story, a key factor in Bone’s perverse attraction/repulsion response to Shannon is that she identifies with the effects of being called horrible names, being labelled and shunned by words specifically chosen to hurt. Allison uses southern colloquialisms and speech rhythms in her writing, especially in dialogue, so that the relaxed-sounding drawl is almost audible to the reader. Thus it comes as a complete shock when at first, the climactic incident in the story comes as if it were a verbal slap across Shannon’s face. Shannon and Bone are outside a revival tent having come up for air from their hiding place in the dark under the stage. Although ‘it was nice, close and dark and full of the sound of people stomping on the stage’ (59), Shannon’s demonic laughter combined with the disturbing lyrics being sung “JESUS AND THE HOLY GHOST ARE TAKING YOUR MEASURE” makes Bone sick to her stomach. The girls emerge from the hell-like basement area and look up:

A very tall man in a purple shirt was standing in front of me ... he had silver boots with cracked heels...

“Lord God!” ... The man was still standing there with his mouth hanging open, a look of horror and shock on his face.

“Lord God,” he said again, and I knew before he spoke what he was gonna say. It wasn’t me who’d surprised him.

“Child, you are the ugliest thing I have ever seen”. (60)

Bone witnesses the destructive impact on Shannon of the word ‘ugly’. As the member of an extended family that uses verbal violence constantly, Bone reads the man’s face and anticipates the damage he is about to do. She reports that ‘Shannon froze. Her mouth fell open, and her whole face seemed to cave in as I watched. Her eyes shrank to little dots, and her mouth became a cup of sorrow’ (61).

Bone’s protective instincts kick in and she hits back hard using the same weapon: words. ““You bastard!” I staggered forward and he backed up, rocking on his little silver heels. “You goddamned gutless son of a bitch!” His eyes kept moving from my face to Shannon’s wilting figure. “You think you so pretty? You ugly sack of shit!”” (61).

The short story version concludes with Bone musing, ‘If there was a God, then there would be justice. If there was justice, then Shannon and I would someday make them all burn’. Bone senses initially that God is somewhere out there, but too busy to bother with the likes of her. By the end of this version of the story, she feels abandoned by God and in purgatory, yet bizarrely connected to Shannon in their desire for revenge. By the end of the novel, Bone has been effectively abandoned by her mother, too; the maternal, material, creative life force as well as the spiritual life force simply leave her to fend for herself. She is in exile.

Bone, though a clever girl, is still too young and immature to separate herself sufficiently from the circumstances of her beatings and sexual abuse by her stepfather

to analyze them. In her case, the notion of the vulnerability and/or agency of the body 'doing' and 'being done to' from the perspective of an abused child who is not being consistently protected by her mother, is terrifying, confusing and physically and emotionally painful. As the nine year old character she cannot yet arrive at the perspective she will come to as an adult woman, and this makes the strongest case for the concept of becoming woman as well as ongoing identity formation.

The episode in the novel from which Dorothy Allison's 'Gospel Song' was excerpted continues with one final trip on the gospel music circuit, and is important as a way to introduce the issue of race in this work. The girls are out in a field in the countryside while Mr. Pearl is off talking to a prospective client and Mrs. Pearl is resting in the shade. From a small church off a dirt road, Bone hears 'Amazing Grace' being sung.

A woman's voice rose and rolled over the deeper men's voices, rolled out so strong it seemed to rustle the leaves on the cottonwood trees...

'Sweet Jesus, she can sing.'

'You hear that? We got to tell your daddy.'

Shannon turned and stared at me with a peculiar angry expression. 'He don't handle colored. An't no money in handling colored.'

[...] 'That an't one good voice. That's a churchful.'

'It's colored. It's niggers.' Shannon's voice was as loud as I'd ever heard it, and shrill with indignation. My daddy don't handle niggers.'

She threw wildflowers at me and stamped her foot. 'And you made me say that. Mama always said a good Christian don't use the word nigger.

Jesus be my witness, I wouldn't have said it if you hadn't made me'.

(1992: 170)

Religious segregation is part of the postcolonial southern legacy that has not yet fallen away. Here the setting is reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. The worshipers are the rural poor and so their sanctuary is a basic structure, 'clapboard walls standing on cement blocks and no pretense of stained glass windows. Just yellow glass reflecting back sunlight, all the windows open to let in the breeze and let out that music' (169). As long as people like Mr. Pearl refuse 'to handle niggers' yet profess to be observant Christians, racism will thrive in this place.

The fight that erupts between the girls is the culmination of all the tensions and hypocrisy riddling the 'friendship' and Bone reacts viciously, ignited by a word and using words in retaliation. 'The way Shannon said "nigger" tore at me, the tone pitched exactly like the echoing sound of Aunt Madeline sneering "trash" when she thought I wasn't close enough to hear' (170). Bone's observation has astonishing impact: she is not black, but as a result of her experience of marginalization, she can know, in this instance, how a black person might feel to be called 'nigger'. The consequences of racist labelling are interrogated in work by both Allison and Wicomb. In Wicomb's short story 'Behind the Bougainvillea' the fact that Frieda has a boyfriend, Henry, must be kept secret. 'Secret, for Father said I was too young to think of boys; besides, Henry Hendrikse, I had heard him say many times, was almost pure kaffir... We were respectable Coloureds' (1987: 116). 'Kaffir' is the closest South African equivalent of 'nigger' and as such, Henry was unsuitable. Words used as weapons, whether defensively or offensively, will influence the target's self-perception and affect her subjectivity. In this case, Frieda is not being targeted, but hearing her father, an educated, generally kind coloured man, use the word 'kaffir' against Henry, who is also coloured but with much darker skin, lays bare for her the hypocrisy and cruelty engendered by their postcolonial and personal circumstances.

The destructive force of pejorative epithets is raised in this story by Wicomb and in Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

In Allison's novel, Shannon, unlike Aunt Madeline, shouts so that Bone *will* hear: 'You nothing but trash. Your mama's trash, and your grandma, and your whole dirty family...' Bone sobs as she hears what she has always known is said about her family, and realizes that, ironically, 'Amazing Grace' is still wafting out over the fields from the church. She forces herself to stop crying and speak quietly: 'You're God's own ugly child and you're gonna be an ugly woman. A lonely, ugly old woman' (171). Being called ugly apparently affects a girl differently from a boy. When this story is set, in the late 1950s, in the culture of which Shannon is part, marriage and motherhood really are the only socially acceptable life path for a girl. To be seen as irredeemably ugly is a life sentence because it renders a girl unmarriageable, doomed to lonely spinsterhood. Just as Shannon's dreams of one day being a bride are shattered by Bone's harsh words, Frieda's vision of the moth eaten wedding dress in the title story 'You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town' comes to mind. In this incident, Allison lays out the complexity of southern life in the 1950s: many aspects intertwine to create the whole picture of a culture, including religion, race, social and economic standing, and gender. Add to this the individual circumstances of the key characters, particularly that of the narrator, Bone, from whose point of view the fight is recounted and understood. There can be no resolution; the story can simply be told, in Allison's case, from a great temporal, geographic and psychic distance since she and Bone, author and character, are both exiles.

The Problematics of Home: Identity and Place in *Cavedweller*

My analysis of Allison's novel *Cavedweller* (1998) takes into account the transnational feminist approach drawn from the work of Lionnet and Shih together with Rosi Braidotti's nomadism. Although the aforementioned theorists light my analytical path through much of this work, Donald E. Hall's book, *Reading Sexualities: Hermeneutic Theory and the Future of Queer Studies* is an important influence on this section in that it serves as a reminder of the need for Gadamerian openness to others. Hall writes about agency and narrative in a way that encourages the challenging praxis of engaging in close reading with an open, questioning mind, and although he does not call it 'nomadism' it seems that he is advocating a form of nomadic critical consciousness:

The Gadamerian meeting and fusion of horizons is always possible, even when we cannot or do not choose to move physically across regional, national, and cultural borders. When we can and choose to do so, the possibilities multiply exponentially. Our own class and gender positions and certainly American economic, media-cultural, and military power make these dynamics far from balanced and fair, but that inequality points to an even greater need for the sensitivity, openness, and self-destabilization that Gadamer calls for. (Hall 2009: 76-7)

Allison's characterization of the protagonist, Delia, in *Cavedweller* is achieved in a way that highlights what Hall calls 'self-destabilization' and also rejects a unitary and naturalized identity. There are other characters in the novel who may be seen as more essentialized 'types' but Delia is not one of them. Since Delia is a working class, single mother who has been ostracised by her family and the inhabitants of the town she used to live in, she survives through establishing relational patterns rather than by submitting to dominant, autonomous power (Lionnet 1989: 245-6). Delia may be voiceless and dependent at the beginning of the novel, but once she decides to leave Los Angeles and return 'home' to Cayro, Georgia, she begins to reclaim her agency.

Her route is not easily mapped. The analogy of the unexpected twists and turns taken by the rhizome best describe her approach to survival.

At the beginning of the novel Delia is living in Los Angeles and has recently heard that her ex-partner and the father of her youngest daughter, Cissy, has been killed in a motorcycle accident. About twelve years prior, in the 1970s, Delia had left her violently abusive husband and their two baby daughters, Dede and Amanda in Cayro, Georgia, and run away with Randall, a rock musician with whom she later goes on to have her third daughter, Cissy. Randall had been the front man of a band and Delia a singer with no formal training. They live together for some time in LA, but after years of Randall's infidelity and drinking, Delia takes young Cissy and leaves Randall's house for a tiny cottage near the beach in Venice, California. Once in her beach cottage, Delia comes to acknowledge her own alcoholism and she struggles every day to stay sober. Her many trials are forms of border crossing; achieving sobriety, however, represents a threshold that cannot be crossed for once and for all. It is a daily challenge. Now that Randall is dead, she announces to her friend Rosemary that she wants to "[g]o home," Delia told her. "I'm going home to get my babies" (5)... "Rosemary, this is what I'm meant to do," Delia said. "It's what I should have done years ago. I don't belong here. I never have. Whatever I loved in the music an't got nothing to do with living here. I hate Los Angeles. It's the outer goddamn circle of hell" (6).

From then on, Delia immerses herself in the appealing myth of home and the elusive notion of belonging. The story she tells herself and ten year old Cissy is that there is a level of safety and acceptance bound up with returning home, and that finding one's place is tantamount to discovering one's identity, or, in Delia's case, repairing one's damaged self. Ironically, it is precisely because her home was not safe

that she left in the first place. The story she tells herself now to justify succumbing to the magnetic pull of the mythical secure home is convincing. Even as she is being extremely naive, it seems possible that this level of determined optimism may well provide agency and momentum in the absence of practical, rational plans or skills. Dorothy Allison will take Delia and Cissy on a nomadic adventure. Numerous transnational border crossings, state lines and states of mind, lie ahead.

Delia and other ‘members’ of the marginalized minority in *Cavedweller* have valuable contributions to make to the dominant majority, and this novel highlights the reciprocity of cultural exchange among diverse groups or individuals that contributes to identity formation. The concept of cultural exchange suggests Lionnet’s *Autobiographical Voices* and her work on *metissage*. *Metis* derives etymologically from the Latin for ‘mixed’. She writes

metissage is a praxis and cannot be subsumed under a fully elaborated theoretical system. *Metissage* is a form of *bricolage*, in the sense used by Claude Levi-Strauss, but as an aesthetic concept it encompasses far more: it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature. Above all it is a reading practice that allows me to bring out the interreferential nature of a particular set of texts, which I believe to be of fundamental importance for the understanding of many postcolonial cultures. If, as Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out, identity is a strategy, [1986, p.9] then *metissage* is the fertile ground of our heterogeneous and heteronomous identities as postcolonial subjects. (Lionnet 1989: 8)

The *metis* is different in every different cultural context and does not always refer to people of mixed race or nationality. There is no precise English equivalent and each occasion of the word’s use is culturally very specific. There are negative associations with *metissage* when translated into English; synonyms may be mongrel or half-breed. This state of affairs is really an excess of identity per Zoë Wicomb’s explanation, rather than something that connotes a deficit. In that case, I call Delia in *Cavedweller* *metis* in that she is originally from the American south, migrated to LA, adopts some

southern Californian cultural traits that she found there, interacts and reacts to circumstances in her life, and then returns home to Cayro, Georgia; Delia is changed and changing. *Metis*, therefore, is not exclusively a racial category; it can also be mapped onto the mixing of cultures and has to do with reciprocal influences. The novel and the character can be read using the praxis of *metissage*. Here, too, as with *Bastard Out of Carolina*, whiteness is not absence of race but should be held up to scrutiny as a crucial component of the interreferential ‘biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature’ Lionnet writes about above.

In *Cavedweller*, the minoritarian or fringe status of the white southerner in LA is a factor to consider in analyzing Delia’s construction. What is interesting about LA, though, is that there really is no racial or ethnic norm. The earliest inhabitants of the region were native Americans known either as the Tongva or the San Gabriel band. The most significant wave of colonisation came with the Spanish in the eighteenth century. The Tongva resisted unsuccessfully.⁷⁵ Today this city is arguably the most diverse in the United States. Most Angeleños come from somewhere else and as such, meet in the spirit of narrative generation with stories to tell of their escape or adventure away from the known home and towards the strange and new. The city’s enormous size and lack of a centre and its associations with the film industry make it the ideal environment for the opportunity to construct a new identity for oneself. While Delia’s outsider status is not particularly unusual in LA, she can still be thought of as a marginalised character, albeit one among many, who up until she begins her car journey back east, back home, feels disempowered, lacking agency, as if life happens to her.

⁷⁵ On an expedition in 1769, Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola and two Franciscan Padres, Serra and Crespi surveyed potential sites for the establishment of a Catholic mission church and a *pueblo* in the vicinity of present day Los Angeles. In 1781 El Pueblo de Los Angeles was founded. From *El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles* by Jean Bruce Poole and Tevvy Ball.

Also minoritarian (in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari use the word⁷⁶) is the relative lack of power of the female characters in ‘a man’s world’. Men dominated LA’s 1970s rock and roll culture as well as the patriarchal southern Baptist small town way of life, the key formative settings in the novel. Cissy, Delia’s daughter initially occupies this marginal status because she is female and a child, and later, as an adolescent when she becomes aware of her own queerness. Coming to consciousness of her sexuality dawns gradually, after Cissy at the age of fifteen sees that possibility in Mim and Jean, her slightly older, spelunking lesbian friends. Another female character on the fringes is Rosemary, Delia’s beautiful, wealthy, black friend from LA. Rosemary defies stereotypes and though visually racially, materially, bodily black, culturally she presents as beyond categorization simply because she does not fit the stereotype of the single, black woman who lives in poor or working class, gang-infested south central LA. When she comes to visit Delia and Cissy in Cayro, Georgia, she is more symbol than character—and their friendship upsets small town southern expectations of race and friendship. Once she has been there for a few weeks, Rosemary comes into somewhat sharper focus as a character, yet the reader continues to be conscious of her as a verbal construct and a not quite realistically-drawn character. This is more likely a stylistic flaw than a deliberately metafictional strategy; still, as Rosemary and Delia spend time together, the depth of their friendship and their relaxed closeness in each other’s company are established. This destabilizing of racial and class norms as a result of the women’s unusual friendship happens more noticeably in the south. LA is a rare place in that its spirit of openness to difference or lateral reciprocal influence, as Lionnet and Shih might put it, is pervasive. The small

⁷⁶ According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980), becoming-minority takes place in opposition to becoming-fascist and is not about greater or fewer numbers of people in a group as much as it is about who is dominant or subordinate.

town south still maintains a significant level of normative socioiocultural rigidity and people are quick to judge.

Characterisation and identity development in *Cavedweller* evoke regionalism, cultural variations and the literal and metaphoric journeys which are forms of transnationalism. Border crossings transpire within and between characters. Of particular relevance here is the intersectionality of the conditions for the domestic violence. Delia's 'becoming' is catalysed by her first husband, Clint Windsor's, frequent savage beating of her. When she reaches her turning point and refuses to take any more abuse, she has little education and negligible job skills; she is a woman, poor and from a working class family; she is white, uneducated, and, so, initially apparently lacking voice or power. Although seemingly voiceless in terms of personal autonomy, it is her singing voice and good looks that she uses as her means of escape. She perpetuates the objectification of herself; her identity is bound up with providing visual and aural entertainment. Delia does not perceive herself as capable of leaving alone and being able to take care of herself. She runs off with or is rescued by the rock star Randall Pritchard, effectively abandoning her two daughters, one of whom is an infant. Abandonment by the mother is a significant theme in Dorothy Allison's work. The idea of the mother who leaves her babies runs counter to the hegemonic myth of martyr-like motherhood, staying, even if it kills her *or* taking the babies and running way with them. She will not save herself by confronting the abuse and the abuser; instead, she pays a massive price and runs away *without* her children, or as her daughters, Amanda and Dede, see it, *from* them. She may be perceived as weak or selfish (which spells damnation for the archetypal mother, and, certainly, most of Cayro condemns her for abandoning her babies), or simply as being in an untenable

predicament. Her standpoint is unknowable and her pain is inexpressible: Elleke Boehmer writes,

Indeed, as Elaine Scarry has influentially argued, pain is a radically incommunicable experience, and the body in pain an absolute other which is rarely if ever brought into representation. This notion is counterbalanced, however, by the assertion of the universality of the experience of suffering, undivided by difference, as in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's reading of Scarry. Even so, discourses of post-independence nationalism and racial solidarity inevitably impose their own definitions of normative pain; certain dominant recuperative selves stand in place of others. There are consequently those among the once-colonised for whom the silences of history have not ended. (2005: 132)

In the case of Delia, her physical and psychic pain can be read in her actions; she runs away from Clint's abuse because she must save her own life and is eventually compelled to return 'home' knowing she will have to do penance. She is among the once colonised who works her way out of silence. Delia's was the silenced and wounded body of the colonised that becomes postcolonial through the process of her transformation, even transfiguration. She claims agency more forcefully once she moves out of Randall's house in LA, years after having left Georgia, and takes her first steps away from alcoholism towards sobriety. Crossing those thresholds render her a transnational figure. In this process she exemplifies Deleuze's becoming woman, a contingent character whose identity keeps evolving.

People cope with pain and the memory of pain in various ways. Judith Butler⁷⁷ talks about the way in which trauma is an ongoing experience and the narration of that trauma turns it into a kind of repeated, manageable narrative that somehow fictionalizes it and makes it possible for the survivor to continue to survive the traumatic experience rather than continue to be victimised by it.. Dorothy Allison

⁷⁷ Judith Butler links trauma and narration in her 2006 "Trauma and the Holocaust" lecture from the European Graduate School YouTube video series. Butler is the Hannah Arendt Chair at the EGS in Saas-Fee, Switzerland where she teaches an intensive Summer Seminar.

does this in *Bastard Out of Carolina* and in some of her short stories. The abuse she describes in the early chapters of *Cavedweller* is vivid, but seems a step removed from what we know of as the creative non-fiction drawn from her lived experience in her other work, which is a blend of memoir, autobiography, and fiction. But, if what Elaine Scarry says about pain being incommunicable is true in that it ‘others’ the sufferer, or if what Rajan counters about the universality of suffering rendering its incommunicability moot, then the reader can adequately grasp Delia’s trauma as expressed by the traumatized author. In other words, we can extrapolate from this that it doesn’t much matter how or why Allison uses this narrative form or even that she is herself a survivor of brutal abuse and has written about how ‘[t]he story becomes the thing needed’ (*Two or Three Things* : 3) even if, “[p]aradoxically, then, to tell a self-constituting tale implies the acceptance of the narrative (and deconstructive) conditions of temporality and lack’ (Boehmer : 133). Delia’s narrative in the first half of *Cavedweller* propels the plot and offers the character an opportunity to move beyond the temporary paralysis presented by the paradox of apparently impossible choices in the context of love and violence. The characterisation of Cissy constitutes the second half of the novel and seems almost a separate book.

Belonging

The transformation I want to examine is Delia’s obsession with getting home and being home—the geographic destination—as well as with learning to be at home within herself. She is clear that she does not belong in LA. She has a nostalgic fantasy about going back to Georgia. The bizarre nature of memory and pain is such that she seems to have edited out the very worst of her lived experiences and focuses instead on fabricating the nostalgia-inducing, positive stereotypes of small town warmth,

community and cooperation. In certain ways, *belonging* is a cultural construction and is reinforced by societal myths as well as the narratives we create for ourselves that justify how and where we believe we do and do not belong. Delia tells herself a story about leaving LA and going back home to the south. Then she actualizes the story. Her migration from LA must be in the form of a cross country drive of a few physically and emotionally exhausting days. A plane ride would never have worked for this type of departure and arrival; it would have been too quick and psychically jolting. The time it takes for Delia and Cissy to drive from one state to the next, west to east, is what reinforces the complexity of the tensions between leaving one place and moving towards a different place. The trip had to be an ordeal with her young daughter, Cissy, resisting, wanting to stay in LA, a place she considers home, and Delia needing to leave and wanting to go to the place she considers home. Delia will be returning to the same place on the map, to her origins, as a different person.

Delia crosses state borders and states of mind to get to a place of strength and self-sufficiency. The course of her journey is affected by the late capitalist patriarchal hierarchy; class, her job skills, the fact that she is a white woman, a mother, a southerner. She finally arrives in Cayro, Georgia and her old best friend MT looks after her, per her fantasy of going home. At the same time the other townsfolk vilify her and she ceases to cope. Her nervous breakdown and subsequent recovery can be cast as a kind of border crossing, a transnational episode of the psyche. As with Bessie Head's character Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, the transformative aspects of mental illness can be seen in terms of a breakdown potentially preceding a breakthrough and also that being 'out of one's mind' can offer the possibility for access to a privileged alternate reality. These psychotic breaks, Delia's in *Cavedweller* and Elizabeth's in *A Question of Power*, can only be understood as

opportunities (with hindsight), if the character recovers. Not emerging stronger and changed for the better, or not emerging at all, would be an absolute tragedy (in the classic sense, evoking pity and terror) and could never be cast as an opportunity that somehow provides creative privilege.

When Delia comes out of her depression, which Cissy refers to as ‘the crying season’, she finds a menial night shift job as an office cleaner, work that has been seen as the province of uneducated blacks and/or women in the south. On the one hand, Delia is at this point both voiceless and invisible because she is nocturnal. On the other hand, this kind of work permits her to reenter the realm of productivity and to earn a living, both of which are necessary for her physical sustenance and emotional wellbeing. Working alone at night has the added benefit of allowing her to avoid interaction with members of an apparently hostile community until she is ready to move among them. Later, Delia works as a hairdresser, a job which requires a great deal of interaction with people. By then, she has recovered sufficiently and seems to be increasingly capable, even strong in her sense of self. At different points in the novel Delia’s idea of her self and the reader’s notion of her identity change. Self perception is inextricable from one’s feelings of belonging.

In her introduction to *Stories of Women*, Boehmer quotes Benedict Anderson: ‘[i]n the modern world everyone can, should, will “have” an identity, as he or she “has” a gender’. Deconstructing this idea we examine what it is to ‘have’, to own, to embody, to possess either a gender or an identity. Having it (gender and/or identity) presupposes its materiality and its fixity, but these qualities or aspects of the self defy rigid and static boundaries, so there is no permanently obvious and externally observable, measurable, knowable or universally essential thing. Gender and identity are not objects to be had they are evolving subjectivities. Is Anderson being ironic?

By having an identity is he referring specifically to a national identity, an ethnic heritage, a place of origin that is a nation-state that one identifies as one's homeland? We are, of course, assigned to such categories, for example, on our passports. While nationalism smacks of exclusivity, the nostalgic myth of home has to do with the return to a place of acceptance and inclusion. Both levels of the concept of home, belonging to the nation-state and the sanctuary of the bosom of the family/dwelling, are imaginary constructions. The individual who is always becoming often undertakes a transnational journey, crossing geographic borders and personal boundaries, on the way to achieving belonging and, in some sense, trying to make his or her way home. Home, when it is not an external dwelling is in one's own skin, in one's own skull—the embodied consciousness aware of its mortality. This suggests Heidegger's concepts of being (after 'the question of Being') and dwelling, of being-in-the-world.⁷⁸ Being and becoming invite links between what we do and who we are.

Minor Transnationalism in *Cavedweller*

Lionnet and Shih point out that within transnationalism, minor or marginal groups are almost always defined in relation to major or dominant groups and that relationships among different marginal identities should be examined. Pushing this notion further, one might look at marginalised individuals (not necessarily entire groups) defined in relation to the dominant norm and observe how, in spite of and because of their differences, they reach out laterally to support each other. In the case of *Cavedweller*, various permutations of relationships can be examined in this light. This view of minoritarian transnationalism is about transversal cooperation as opposed to assimilation. In looking at *Cavedweller* through the lens of transnational nomadism,

⁷⁸ From Hubert Dreyfus's 1991 book *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Division I. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

I am holding Delia and Cissy, the mother and daughter, up against the dominant culture/s in which they find themselves and noticing the differences, the gaps and the overlaps that they represent. In performing themselves in their own way, and on the margins, they are transgressive vis-à-vis the dominant norms. Their transgressions are nomadic in that they open up space for unpredictable creativity in how they act and interact. Depending on the circumstances, their transgressive positions are deliberately held or may be forced upon them by others.

In order to illustrate how cooperative lateral minority networks come about, it is necessary to set *Cavedweller* aside for the moment and examine how Allison's subjectivity as a poor, lesbian, abused, white southerner contributed to her identity formation and her writing. The article 'Meeting at a Barbecue: Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy Allison and Apocalyptic Literary Miscegenation' by Julia C. Erhardt argues for the literary links between Allison, Carson McCullers, Zora Neale Hurston and Minnie Bruce Pratt. The issue of racial mixing, even in literature, is significant for southern writing in a similar way to its importance for South African writing. Even though it is and has been common practise for southern writers to have racially intermingled literary influences on their work, according to Erhardt there has been a literary colour line. The notion of art itself being segregated by the artist's race is disturbing since some of the richest, most aesthetically pleasing literature, music and visual arts are works influenced by other artists of many different races and nationalities. The idea of 'literary miscegenation' provides Erhardt with a vehicle for showcasing some of the black, southern influences on Allison's work, and it highlights the symbolism and regional variations of southern cooking and the communal ritual of enjoying food with one's people. She stretches the point arguing 'the barbecue imagery in Allison's text directly descends from Hurston's, and

therefore, that the literary miscegenation taboo that artificially segregated Southern literature much in the same way that barbecue has traditionally maintained Southern racial, class, and gender hierarchies' (72). In the interview conducted by Minnie Bruce Pratt, Dorothy Allison acknowledges James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, both black writers, as inspirational to her own writing. She speaks about being enthralled and inspired by Zora Neale Hurston's use of dialect and southern speech rhythms. This style of writing allowed Allison to make use of the working class, white South Carolinian expressions and speech patterns which render her prose powerful and memorable. For her, there is no race discernible behind the words, only effective writing.⁷⁹

In her interview with Minnie Bruce Pratt⁸⁰, in addition to talking about her whiteness and her working class, poor background, Dorothy Allison also talks about leaving her home and family for as long as ten years before she felt better about their acceptance of her and hers of them. She still finds them racist and homophobic. Allison reveals, 'It's hell for me dealing with my sisters. But I'm trying to love and accept them. There's this huge piece of their psyche that I cannot love and accept. I mean, they can barely tolerate me as a queer. They sure as shit will never talk to me about it.' She tells Minnie Bruce Pratt about becoming a feminist and creating a kind

⁷⁹ As Jan Cooper and Thadious Davis have argued, this conception of Southern literature is a scholarly myth that is in desperate need of dismantling. Echoing the conviction that literary miscegenation is a definitive tradition in Southern letters, Patricia Yaeger insists that if critics wish to analyze the complexities as well as the content of Southern women's writing, the critical and methodological boundaries erected by the literary color line must be crossed. Rather than obeying traditional interpretive categories that divide African-American and white Southern literary traditions, Yaeger has urged scholars to generate new analytic practices that bring them together (60). As manifested in Yaeger's own influential "reconstruction" of Southern women's writing, *Dirt and Desire*, these new critical approaches reveal the segregation of the Southern literary canon to be an intellectual fallacy (Erhardt: 72).

⁸⁰ This 1995 interview took place in Boston and contains references to Allison's family's attitude to her lesbianism and to their own level of comfort with racism, which she says poor whites will loudly acknowledge while the middle class and wealthy would be too embarrassed to admit. While she calls herself an outlaw, she may also be seen as a transnational nomad, a variation on the outlaw theme.

of family of choice where she is accepted. Allison explains the xenophobia she saw and felt directed at her growing up,

The community I saw myself in—at the edge of the world—hated me. The white Southerner hates with a passion everybody different from them—there’s no way around it. But the community of affinity for me was the queer community—that outlaw community. And it was clear to me—crystal clear—by the time I was a teenager that I had more in common with black people who were in the civil-rights movement than I did with my stepfather. Especially when I got the shit kicked out of me. (Pratt interview, 1995)

She exemplifies those on the edges who establish bonds with others who are also marginalized. This way they can help each other claim agency and decolonise themselves. Allison has her characters follow a similar path. Delia in *Cavedweller* survives and goes on to live a fulfilling life due to the support she receives from her old, close friends. Her daughter Cissy discovers as she grows up that she, too, needs to reach out to create reciprocal networks of support in order to thrive.

By the end of *Cavedweller*, Cissy awakens to her own lesbianism but Allison does not introduce an object of desire or an opportunity for her to have a sexual relationship with another woman. Allison’s characterisation of Cissy suggests that she is someone who would want to move away from home and the community that knows her, take time to settle into a new place and get to know new people and herself before becoming involved in a relationship. She is not impetuous and has seen enough examples of bad relationships that she would be cautious. She would need to leave Cayro in order to live out the life that best fits who she is. The judgmental southern Baptist atmosphere in the town is oppressive, and her own half sister Amanda is stridently homophobic in her conversation with Cissy who says,

“Time for me to make some plans of my own.”
“Long as you stop running around with those girls.” Amanda’s face assumed a familiar pinched expression. “There’s something not right about them.”

“Oh, they’re just like everybody else,” Cissy said. “They an’t any more crazy than you or me.”

“Is that so? Well I saw them sitting in that truck the last time you went out with them, you know... That tall one put her arm around the other one, leaned over, and kissed that girl right on the mouth. Looked to me like they’re considerably more crazy than you.” ...

“I think they’re lesbians,” Amanda said with authority...

“You don’t know anything about them, Amanda.” Cissy felt sick. She had the strongest desire to lean over and slap her sister...

Cissy felt as if Nadine’s wine had turned to poison in her belly.

“Maybe I’m a lesbian too.”

“Maybe you are,” Amanda said flatly. “I always knew there was something wrong with you.” (399-400)

Sexuality aside, the nomadic individual whose ideology is at odds with those of the rest of the family, is one who also leaves home to make home, even if the move is, initially, not literally ‘away’. What is likely to happen is a philosophical change of mind which precedes a geographic change of place. A spiral cycle illustrates the evolution of identity formation: the individual effects the transformation of space to place by means of language. The cycle continues both psychically and materially.

Namaqualand breezes and Glasgow gusts: Place and identity in ‘Nothing Like the Wind’

Zoe Wicomb’s narrator in the 2008 story ‘Nothing Like the Wind’⁸¹ addresses questions about the protagonist, Elsie’s, identity from the third person semi-omniscient perspective. This point of view makes it apparent that while the narrator is not Elsie, she seems to have privileged access to Elsie’s thoughts. The narrator asks the question directly, ‘Who is she?’ (137) and proceeds to answer it by assembling a mosaic of evidence, both material and psychological. The narrator’s question echoes

⁸¹ “Nothing Like the Wind” comes from Wicomb’s most recent short story collection *The One That Got Away*, first published in 2008 in South Africa by Umuzi and then in 2009 in New York by The New Press.

Fanon's, but is, perhaps, less abstract because it is not overtly reflexive, although there may be an element of Wicomb asking herself, 'Who am *I* now that I have lived for some time in exile?' The author has had years during which to acclimatise and mentally process the impact of exile on her own developing identity. It is from this vantage point that she is able to render her young protagonist's fresh, raw experience of dislocation and deterritorialisation with richness and a perspective that is complicated by its realism and its postmodern undercurrents. The author knows and transcribes the lived reality of internal, psychic exile as well as the material challenges of adapting to a new country as an immigrant. This story, particularly identity development in the main character, is infused with an exilic consciousness.

The reader pieces together the background information and insights offered by the narrator in order to arrive at a sense of Elsie's identity: she is constituted by her gender, race and class and her own particular history, in the way that most realistically drawn fictional characters are. Exilic consciousness and its effect on identity formation can be thought of as a game of musical chairs. The exile knows how it feels to arrive at the last chair a second after someone else has claimed it, however, while the game has a clear and speedy resolution, the state of exile does not. For Elsie, that ongoing feeling of displacement is associated with trying to communicate in a language she expected she would have command of, navigating the subtleties of an alien class hierarchy, and, on the simple yet essential level of survival, trying to stay warm and dry in a harsh, foreign climate. Her younger brother, Freddie, we discover later, does not survive. Leaving chaotic, crime-ridden post-apartheid postcolonial South Africa for the apparent safety and civility of the metropolis does not, in Freddie's case, guarantee protection from a violent death. The irony is tragic. Elsie's father is bereft and Elsie herself, already struggling to hang on to elusive points of

reference, is now and then quite unmoored, first by the shock of the alien culture and later by Freddie's murder.

At various moments in 'Nothing Like the Wind', Elsie's different facets are revealed. She is, among other things, a teenage girl, a fifth-former, a new immigrant to urban Glasgow from the rural, desert-like Karoo region of South Africa. She thinks, now that she is living in a class-obsessed culture, that her immediate family, consisting of her father and her younger brother, Freddie (until his death) may be 'upper-working class or lower-middle class'. (136) On every level she struggles to make the adjustment to her new circumstances in her new country, and every step reveals her as someone liminal, in addition to acculturating, she is being and becoming. When the process overwhelms her, she seeks to step out of the roiling flux of identity formation, if just for a little while when 'Elsie scrambles into her bed, black frock and all, and pulls the covers over her head' (144-5). Just as she seems ready to play her expected role and perform herself as a teenage girl getting ready to be picked up by a boy from school, 'Hassan or Hussein', to attend the end-of-year dance, she calls off the performance and retreats, physically and psychologically.

This is one of the few stories in which Wicomb uses magic realism and here she does it to show the extent of Elsie's overloaded system as she tries to make sense of having left her homeland for such a strange place where the unimaginable has happened: her brother Freddie is murdered. Ironically, their father brings them to Scotland to be safe from South Africa's violent crime. With mounting stress from all the challenges she must face, the narrator shows Elsie slipping into a different reality. She goes 'home' in her mind for a brief respite from her present struggles. Glasgow's traffic sounds remind Elsie of the sound of the Karoo winds. The narrator says that 'it is the sound of waves that roars in her ears' and that '[t]he sound of waves allows her

to fill in the scene with anything at all' (136). She insists that she knows where she is, that she has not lost her mind, yet she does blend memory with present reality to fabricate something new—the sense that although she is hearing the sounds of Glasgow, particularly the traffic on the Great Western Road below, she is interpreting them as the sounds of South Africa. The use of Afrikaans words, like *bedonderd*—irritable to the point of insanity, and *stoep*—porch or verandah, specifically situate Elsie's visualisation of the aftermath of a Karoo windstorm. By her metacognitive acknowledgment of both places simultaneously, and the disclaimer regarding her sanity, she is acknowledging her liminality and the fact that she is fundamentally out of place. The flat is her home only in name. Physically in Glasgow, the traumatic experience of her brother's molestation and murder by a man with 'flaming red hair and paper-pale skin' (143) has Elsie call up her original home in her imagination, where she can surround herself with all that is familiar, and, therefore, feel safe. Wicomb shows Elsie's awareness of the way in which she traverses the distance between here and there in her mind when she needs to. This level of self-consciousness provides a compelling example of multi-layered nomadism and fluctuating identity formation as it unfolds in a fictional character.

The sound of traffic is nothing like the wind.

Elsie knows that. She's not mad, deranged, out of her head, *bedonderd*; all the piglets are safely in the pen, but what she hears all the same is the wind, rushing between outbuildings, sweeping through mimosa trees, through that place. The scene, fully converted from sound, is clear and detailed: Rover's chipped enamel plate lies on its side by the shed door; the wheelbarrow waits with Jafta's blue overalls slung over the handle; shrivelled mimosa balls are blown into an arced ridge against the wall of the *stoep*. Elsie likes Miss Smith's story of a butterfly's wing at the tip of Africa that triggers a hurricane on a still European shore, infinitesimal, but indisputable there as a reason. The conversion of traffic on the Great Western Road is equally precise ... But she does not want to know why the sound of traffic translates itself into the moan of the wind through that distant landscape. (135)

Elements of the dry, empty, windswept Karoo of her past merge with elements of the rainy, densely populated city of her present. The smell of ripe figs from the tree outside the farmhouse in South Africa floats with her and her family all the way to Scotland and settles into the flat. Wicomb disturbs the idea of a place-centred identity by weaving together a narrative blend using sensory connections that defy actual place; she also uses memory and the fantastical. The critic D.W. de Villiers writes that ‘one of the ways in which Wicomb sets forth an unstable, surprising world is to problematise the status of memory’ (LitNet online) which becomes a creative process for Elsie moving from sound to visual recollection. The narrator describes this process as ‘conversion’ which ‘translates’ and, as de Villiers puts it ‘manages to register the evanescent play of consciousness as impinged upon by sense impressions...An overt example of this occurs in “Nothing Like the Wind” when Elsie “listening to the traffic on the Great Western Road”, manages to “track [...] the sound of a double-decker bus along the incline from Kelvinbridge, an incline that pedestrians may barely be aware of, but as the traffic lumbers up towards the robots-she must remember to say traffic lights-the sound betrays the gradient” (137). What is captured here is one of the myriad ways in which we locate ourselves in-and place ourselves in relation to-the world we inhabit.’⁸² From our daily experience we know the topography of where we are and we remind ourselves to switch to words that are intelligible to the people in the new place. Traffic lights are called robots in South Africa and Elsie has to consciously rename nouns in the new place, a different kind of translation or conversion she undertakes in order to adapt.

The short story form necessarily condenses and intensifies character formation because of its limited space. Interestingly, in making the sensory-fantastical

⁸² D.W.de Villiers’s review of *The One That Got Away* appears in LitNet, a South African multicultural online journal, 2 October 2008 www.argief.litnet.co.za

connection in this piece, short and unsustained as it is, Wicomb calls up echoes of Bessie Head's nightmarish sensory-fantastical novel, *A Question of Power*. While Wicomb employs the short story, Head makes use of the novel form in order to portray the long descent into mental illness, and while Wicomb slips briefly into and out of magic realism, Head immerses her protagonist in phantasm for entire chapters. If Head pioneered this approach as a South African woman writer, Wicomb perfects it. In this story, Wicomb invites uncertainty about place and identity in a way that richly complicates those ideas.

The difference in Wicomb's writing style in 'Nothing Like the Wind' has to do with time; this piece, from her latest collection, was written after having lived in Scotland for many years. References to the western Cape are far more concentrated and intense here, though less frequent than in her earlier work where setting is almost diffuse by comparison. The author herself is still writing variations on the themes of her own life: identity, exile and place, but moves more deftly between settings with the perspective provided by the passage of time. Wicomb tells this story with the exilic consciousness of a writer who is aware that neither her own nor Elsie's identities has arrived at a terminus. They are both in the process of becoming, of doing themselves and their lives in Scotland.

Shaped by Place: Identity and Nomadic Transnationalism in Zoë Wicomb's 'There's the Bird that Never Flew'⁸³

In this section, I interrogate individual subjectivity and ideas about place, original and destination, actual and metaphorical in Zoë Wicomb's short story

⁸³ A version of this analysis was presented by me at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SA MLA) conference in Atlanta in November, 2011.

‘There’s the Bird that Never Flew.’⁸⁴ These issues converge in Wicomb’s work in the tension within and between her South African characters of mixed race, a self-assured young, male artist, Drew, and his new wife, Jane, initially an anxious and tentative woman, on their honeymoon in Scotland. Wicomb challenges both Jane’s assumptions and the reader’s. In having Jane hold up a mirror to herself, the author encourages the reader to reflect, too. While Jane emerges as nomadic, the reader is nudged towards a similar nomadic transnationalism of thought.

Nomadism is about thinking subversively, and is particularly apt to a reading of ‘There’s the Bird that Never Flew’. The husband, Drew, seems to come by and ‘own’ his irreverent transnationalism quite naturally; Jane, the young wife, however, is shown actively wrestling with hegemonic notions, pushing back, and, eventually, courageously crossing boundaries en route to greater self awareness. For much of the story, Jane manifests an exilic consciousness, the desire to belong and the sense that in various ways one does not, for all that she is not technically an exile or a migrant.

Migrancy, regardless of economic status, is bound up with questions about the spectrum of power and powerlessness. Carine Mardorossian focuses on the relationship between experiencing exile and representing it, a recurring theme in Wicomb’s work:

[O]ver the last decade or so, some exiled postcolonial writers have reconfigured their identity by rejecting the status of exile for that of migrant. Both Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee, for instance, have adopted the term “(im)migrant” to describe both their literary production and their personal experience of transculturation ... The shift from exile to migrant challenges [this] binary logic by emphasizing movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages... Because of her displacement, the migrant’s identity undergoes radical shifts that alter her self-perception and often result in her ambivalence towards both her old and new existence... Her identity is no longer to do with being but becoming. (15-16)

⁸⁴ ‘There’s the Bird that Never Flew’ comes from Wicomb’s most recent short story collection *The One That Got Away* (2008)

The binary logic Mardorossian is referring to is constructed between an alienating 'here' and a romanticized 'there' or homeland. She seeks to nudge readers away from the traditional idea that an exiled writer observes and creates from the privileged position of someone straddling two cultures while fully belonging in neither. While literary criticism may be shifting the paradigm from exile to migrant, popular culture and the mainstream media seem stuck with the traditional definitions of those words. The noun most frequently used in the popular media with 'migrant' is 'worker.'

During apartheid, the black majority, including Africans and coloureds, constituted a huge army of low-income migrant workers. In the short story 'There's the Bird That Never Flew', however, Wicomb does not address the plight of this particular class or category of worker. Her coloured South African characters are part of a new, post-apartheid, educated middle class, so there is no sense here of the desperation to subsist that permeates some other, earlier apartheid-era South African literature in general. Wicomb's departure from the stereotype of the dispossessed, often alcoholic, coloured laborer in South African literature signals the introduction of a complex character living in a newly democratic society, while fashioning a new identity⁸⁵. Wicomb's characters are transnational and nomadic for reasons that both include and transcend their gender, race, and class, though the roots of their nomadism remain deeply embedded in South Africa's postcolonial, racialized context. Her characters are embarking on an adventure in which they create new narratives of themselves and their people. Drew enters the short story having apparently already told himself the story of who he is, while Jane is observed in the process of identity creation.

⁸⁵ Alex La Guma's 1962 short story collection *A Walk in the Night* is an example of the earlier type of writing, as is Richard Rive's 1986 novella "*Buckingham Palace*", *District Six*. Both writers create black and coloured characters who struggle with the harsh realities of apartheid. They live in segregated working class neighborhoods and urban slums where crime and alcohol and drug abuse are commonplace.

I would add to the list of exiles and migrants another kind of nomad who is a temporary sojourner in a 'new' place not the result of having fled: a tourist or traveller.

A stereotypical tourist might spend a few days or weeks in various different geographic locations on a traditional holiday which is a restorative respite from work and routine. She may travel as a nomadic tourist and dabble in various fresh, new, subversive ways of seeing or thinking about a situation by virtue of immersing herself in a place that encourages a new perspective. Sometimes a break (holiday) pre-empts a break (rupture) with old patterns. It may be the place itself or the movement between places that is responsible for new ways of seeing. Jane, the South African protagonist in Wicomb's 'There's the Bird that Never Flew', is literally a tourist from the Cape to Glasgow, Scotland, and also becomes, over the course of the story, a nomadic subject in the transnationalist sense. While exile may be perceived as a permanent state and being a tourist as a temporary designation, both experiences can contribute significantly to the ongoing identity formation of the individual who experiences either of these manifestations of being out of place.

In her PhD dissertation, Caren Kaplan writes that she finds most interesting 'in literary modernism, in tension with its cultural sibling postmodernism, the conflation of literal exile with metaphoric representations of distance and loss. This conflation operates in most modernist theories of exile and travel literature' (15). The postmodern subject may feel exilic alienation from her own body and her circumstances without ever leaving home, family, community, or nation. In the case of Jane's honeymoon trip to Scotland, her literal travel can be conflated with her sense of existential exile, but she is not left with a sense of 'distance and loss' as much as she finds the distance a spur to propel her forward in terms of self-awareness. Her

discomfort may be a sufficient catalyst to encourage her to push against norms and transcend figurative borders. In doing so, she charts a different map of her own transnationalism. To take it one step further, if distance and loss are factors in nomadism (not necessarily literal exile), they are necessary destabilising precursors to often shocking new theories or perceptions which may bring an unanticipated fulfilment. Nomads are on an intellectual journey and their purpose is to interrogate previously unexamined ways of thinking that may have been held dear because of habit or sentimentality; tradition, of course, enacts its own hegemony. The logical continuation of this notion is a discussion about the postmodern feminist nomad.

Braidotti encourages feminists to cultivate a nomadic consciousness. She says,

[M]y work at this time focuses on the intersection of identity, subjectivity, and epistemology from a poststructuralist angle of sexual difference. The central issue is the interconnectedness between identity, subjectivity, and power. The self being a sort of network of interrelated points, the question then becomes: By what sort of interconnections, sidesteps, and lines of escape can one produce feminist knowledge without fixing it into a new normativity? (1994: 31)

Braidotti embraces an unusual form of postmodernism that accepts both the loss of boundaries as well as some necessary forms of stability required to provide a base from which to engage in intellectual transitions, to engage in rhizomatic nomadism. A measure of situatedness therefore allows for the fluid development of a postmodern nomadic feminism that is never complete, neither for the gendered subject nor the epistemology itself. It is, therefore, highly relevant that Jane is characterized as she is by Wicomb, that the reader knows or infers the back story of Jane's life and family relationships, her history, before meeting her in the present on her honeymoon in Glasgow. The author utilizes Jane's specific, material origins to highlight her later nomadic evolution. The tension between fixity and flux works effectively to reveal Jane as being and becoming. Nomadism does not have homelessness or the person as

a tabula rasa as prerequisites for its subversive project; whatever its form or duration, human beings need a home base that is a material shelter as well as a base (or progressive bases) that is the starting point of their thinking. The nomadic subject is, therefore, linked to an historical situation, embodied and situated while simultaneously experiencing ongoing identity transformations effected by circumstances from her past and present. This view allows for a certain measure of strategic essentialism without which the acceptance of a measure of constructedness might not exist. Seeing a character in this light reveals not a singular, unified identity but multiple subjectivities. Wicomb's characterization of Jane unfolds this process. In fact, the thrill and progress offered by subversion would evaporate in the absence of a received code against which to push and create change. Origins matter, but they are not destiny.

In the introduction to their 2003 book *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier and Sheller encapsulate the concept also proposed by Braidotti: 'Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached' (1). I find convergences with this fluid approach in my analysis of Jane in Wicomb's short story, as I explore the individual and belonging in the context of transnationalism. Conventional understandings of home, community, and identity in this story are problematised when viewed through the lens of nomadic transnational feminism. The author herself is, among other things, an exile and/or migrant, and, certainly, nomadic. Her character, Jane, exhibits tentative forays into nomadic behavior while still in the Cape, before undergoing a more dramatic transformation at the Doulton Fountain in Glasgow. By marrying Drew, an artist, Jane pushes back against her mother's expectations and preferences for her daughter, 'You in love with an artist! Her mother had screamed.

Are you mad, after all I've spent on your education? ... Drew! What kind of name was that? If his was the drawing business, then it was no good having a name that announced that his career was in the past, all finished and klaar' (65-67). The fact that Drew, Jane's choice of life partner, *is* an artist, especially a coloured artist, is crucial to Jane's growth and her departure from family norms. Jane's mother, Grace, is worried that Drew will not be able to provide for her daughter. The reference to his name as a past tense verb form is ominous to Grace. Even though the story is set in the early twenty first century and Jane is educated and capable of earning a living, Grace continues to cling to the traditional heteronormative notion that a husband should be in a position to support his family, and Grace is probably expecting grandchildren to come of the union because procreation after marriage is the normal course of events. Grace has seen footage of street-performing pavement artists on TV and harbors prejudice against artists whom she thinks of as impractical, lazy luftmenschen who do not have real jobs. While her mother cannot fathom what it is that an artist does or why, Jane mistrusts her own appreciation of art. These questions about the meaning and purpose of art are key underpinnings of the entire story. In fact, the unanswerability of abstract questions, particularly about art, flag up Jane's early difficulty with a nomadic postmodernist attitude. Later in the story, when she looks at art (and herself) without judging, it is apparent that she is moving up the spiral of cognitive consciousness by letting go of old, proscriptive practices.

Near the beginning of the story, Drew tells her to simply sit and look at a piece of art and see it for what it is rather than attempt to solve some arcane puzzle. By looking at the object and being able to describe it, he assures her, the piece will reveal itself to her; she does not need to force out meaning. Jane starts out quite conflicted about the fluctuating status of knowledge and her own self-knowledge. She

remembers how her late father ‘understood cultured to mean respectable, and somehow bound up with incomplete set of Encyclopedia Britannica he had bought on the Parade’ (67). If Jane was brought up conflating respectability with codified knowledge from the imperial metropolis, it is not surprising that she is now engaged in a struggle with letting go of hegemonic ‘answers’ and embracing the uncertainty of questions. She thinks it ‘[o]dd to go on fearing an imprecation that turns out to mean something quite different from what she thought it meant. Jane wishes that she didn’t care’ (67).

Community and Nation: The State of the Exile

To be examined here is the interaction between the individual as one person and the group. In the case of the characters in Wicomb’s short story, the group may be constituted by the racial category assigned South Africans of mixed race by a governmental agency. What happens to the identity of the culturally constructed group when the government falls and bureaucratically-sanctioned categorization ceases? This question reverberates as the reader watches the unfolding identities of Drew and Jane, as well as other characters of Wicomb’s creation. The ‘state’ of the exile refers both to the mental and physical condition of a single person in exile as well as to the ‘state’ as homeland or adopted nation state of that person in exile or away. Home can refer to the original house and family in which and with whom the individual grew up. It can refer to the nation state or homeland, the geographic place of the individual’s birth and early childhood. Or ‘home’ may refer to a series of physical shelters in which a person lives throughout the course of his or her life; ‘home’ is not necessarily the original or first shelter and need not be, possibly even cannot be, a finished concept. It is neither one’s starting point nor one’s ending point. As long as one is

alive, one is constantly creating and recreating home. In this, home shares certain properties with identity. Home and identity may be conflated for the individual who is imbued with a sense of inner peace, where one is one's own sanctuary. Such a person is comfortable in her own skin and can enjoy solitude. For the person who is physically on the move, as an exile, migrant, nomad, or tourist, the embodied consciousness may provide a sense of home. Conversely, where an individual is experiencing ongoing angst and is not at home in his or her body, being on the move could be perceived as a kind of physical and psychic deracination. In that case, a sense of home and a sense of identity might both be out of reach.

The stakes are different for the tourist because the amount of time spent away from home is limited and there will come a point at which the tourist must return home. Jane's transformation over the course of Wicomb's story is conditioned by the relative artificiality of her situation, a woman temporarily out of place and out of time, knowing that she will be going back. However, she will return a different person, not for having found answers but because of having found new ways to ask questions. The honeymoon as a traditional rite of passage magnifies the notion of experiential and intellectual border-crossings.

Regardless of one's preference for the term exile or migrant, the nomad can be either. The nomadic individual whose ideology is at odds with those of the rest of the family and community, is one who also leaves home to make home, even if none of the move is, initially, physically, materially 'away'. What is likely to happen is a philosophical change of mind that precedes a geographic change of place. A spiral cycle illustrates the evolution of identity formation: the individual effects the transformation of space to place by means of language, Place has a transformative effect on identity formation, and the individual finds herself in a different space. Place

refers to one's physical location or to the place of one's thinking while space is the distance between one place and another. Language provides the link between the two. The spiral continues both psychically and materially and may be thought of as a transnational experience.

The Tourist in 'There's the Bird That Never Flew'

To link back to the notion of identity, it will be useful to examine subjectivity in the context of transnational feminism in literature; as Braidotti puts it in her interview⁸⁶ with Sara Suleri, she seeks to analyze 'what is happening to bodies, identities, belongings, in a world that is technologically mediated, ethnically mixed and changing very fast in all sorts of ways'. In this story, home, identity and belonging are complicated by the fact of Wicomb's protagonist, Jane's being a South African woman of mixed race travelling in the United Kingdom where she is neither an exile nor a migrant, but a tourist. The story is set after the fall of apartheid and in the era of the new, democratic South Africa, but, of course, eras do not have clear cut beginning and endings. Generational overlaps in attitude ensure that issues of race and nation, among others, are always highly complex. The narrative perspective is from the third-person point of view. The narrator has subjective knowledge limited to Jane throughout the story, except for one occasion near the beginning when Grace, Jane's mother's thoughts are revealed. This is where Wicomb lays the groundwork for questions about the tension between traditional and progressive attitudes regarding identity.

Although she is spending some time in Scotland, geographically very far away from Cape Town, on her honeymoon with her husband, Drew, Jane's process does not, at first, seem nomadic in the philosophical sense. In other words, Jane does not

⁸⁶ The interview 'On Nomadism: Interview with Rosi Braidotti' appears in the online journal *European Alternatives* (2010).

initiate new ways of thinking; in the first part of the story she is reactive rather than proactive in this regard. Any significant unsettling of received ideas is orchestrated by Wicomb through her narrator who uses Jane's social and psychic insecurity as the ground on which to play out the turns of postmodern indeterminacy. In questioning herself, Jane is really questioning everything else; in this sense, thrown into relief by Drew's nonchalant and confident demeanour, her nomadic consciousness emerges as the story progresses. Actually, Drew evokes Jane's potential to look and see differently, to think differently, by how he acts and what he says. He propels her towards subversive, new (for Jane) ideas. At his urging, space becomes place for Jane through language, and in this process her identity is seen to evolve following a spiral trajectory. From a feminist perspective, it is disconcerting to have the catalyst for change, the exemplar, be a somewhat arrogant male character; however, if the reader is to experience an approximation of the ideological destabilisation, followed by productive confusion that the fictional character undergoes, Wicomb skilfully achieves this effect precisely because of the way in which she deploys Drew.

The title 'There's the Bird that Never Flew' begs the question: what is the point of the creature having wings and the characteristics of 'bird-ness' if it cannot or does not fly? Why point out anomalies? Should meaningful art resolve paradoxes or generate more questions than it answers? Would we include literary art (Wicomb's) as well as fine art (Drew's), and what exactly constitutes those categories? Early on in the story, the narrator, with a nod to the work's postmodern sensibility, reports Jane's thoughts, 'It turns out that questions are all that matters; no one seems to demand answers, and that is what she finds frustrating' (65). This frustration precedes the process by which received ideas are disturbed and new and different understandings can emerge. Wicomb may be having a little fun by exaggerating the extent to which

poststructuralism refuses binaries like questions *or* answers and art *or* reality. Jane, prior to her transformation, thinks, ‘No wonder coloured people don’t care about art...’ (65), a sweeping generalization that cannot be accurate because her husband is a coloured artist.

This story’s title comes from the song that Margaret, the Scottish cleaning lady at the Glasgow bed and breakfast sings towards the end of the story. It is linked to the story of Glasgow’s coat of arms, so the question of lost potential is also connected to establishment in place:

There’s the tree that never grew
 There’s the bird that never flew
 There’s the fish that never swam
 There’s the bell that never rang (78)

This list of unrealized potential has the reader wondering ‘why?’ or ‘why not?’ What is the purpose of each object if it does not do that which one expects of it? Wicomb has the third person narrator immediately at the beginning of the story reveal Jane’s preoccupation with art, its utility and proper appreciation. If the tree, the bird, the fish and the bell are artistic representations of the real in the rhyme, then they cannot do any of the things that the actual objects can do; they are ‘merely’ representations. In her characterization of Jane, Wicomb herself takes a nomadic approach, creating a character whose inherent uncertainty about herself and about her place in the world raises unsettling questions that provoke new ways of thinking. By travelling to a new place and literally changing her mind by thinking differently, she becomes nomadic. Jane’s identity formation reveals itself as a process of becoming, spatially and temporally, across the story.

The intertextuality of the rhyme plays off the ditty that Drew sings in response to the St. Mungo song sung by Margaret, the cleaner. Drew recalls his coloured

granny in the Cape Province singing a similar riddle in Afrikaans, 'Daar's 'n hoender wat 'n eier nie kan le nie...' (79) meaning, 'there's a hen that cannot lay an egg' and refers to the cockerel weather vane perched atop a church spire. Margaret's melancholy song raises unanswerable questions while Drew's happily points out the difference between the literal and the figurative. Laughing, he says, 'See how the Glasgow story seems to regret the difference between the real and the image, whereas our colonial version is upbeat, ready to celebrate representation, or one could say that the real...But Jane stops him. Could he not, for once, listen to her?' (79). The singing of rhymes and riddles has been occasioned by Jane's loss of the wedding ring she has only had for eight days, since their wedding. Margaret, the charlady, in an attempt to reassure Jane that the ring may yet be found, shows Jane the Glasgow city coat of arms on a tourist brochure with a picture of a fish holding a ring in its mouth. The fish has found the ring in a fountain and Jane thinks she may have lost her ring while studying the Doultou Fountain. When Drew hears of Margaret's song, he counters with his colonial version and, self-involved as ever, attempts to launch into a lecture on the representational versus the real. Jane is upset about the real loss of her real wedding band as well as the symbolic loss of marital harmony its loss might foreshadow. She had not wanted to wear it in the first place. Neither Jane nor the narrator give any sign that her opposition to wearing a wedding ring is because it is a symbol of heteronormative subjectivity, but because the text stirs up so many questions about accepted norms, the reader wonders about the meaning of Jane having worn a ring at all and Drew having chosen not to wear one. He is the trailblazer, the nomad, comfortable in leaving behind outdated practices and expectations; Jane takes her own route and arrives at ideological border crossings in her own time.

If marriage of the kind described in the story has been a Western, Judeo-Christian cultural construction designed to provide a supportive environment in which to procreate, then Jane's sudden realization that she does not want to have children represents a kind of border crossing. When Margaret shows her a photograph of her new grandchild, Jane stares 'intently at the close-up of the baby with its swollen red cheeks, [and] it strikes her that she would not like to have a baby. To reproduce a fearful, tottering creature like herself, brimful with embarrassment, cannot be a good thing' (75). She is often inhibited, unsure, and self-conscious but even if she were not, she might not want to have a baby, and this sets her apart from the old norm, and, perhaps, Margaret's expectation of her as the young newlywed eager for motherhood. When she examines the four niches of the massive Victorian Doulton Fountain, each with its carved tableaux of a strong, young colonial couple, the Indian, Canadian, Australian, and South African pairs of women and men she sees, she realizes are 'future mummies and daddies with agricultural produce that presage babies' (75-76). The wealth of the colonies was seen to depend as much on natural resources that the centre or metropole could appropriate as on its nationalistic patriotism, which required that more of the 'right kind' of citizen be produced. Hence heterosexuality, church-sanctioned marriage, and reproduction have been the duty of good, 'normal' nation-builders.

On the one hand, in losing the ring, Jane lets go of stale associations around marriage and liberates herself so that she and Drew can forge their own way forward. On the other, Jane may fear that the loss of her ring is an omen about her relationship with Drew. It seems that no, Drew could not "for once, listen to her" and therein lies the discord and dissymmetry between them. He is an artist and a man and is seen to get away with doing whatever he wants, including trivializing his wife's fears. If the

marriage does not last, Jane will have been a tourist visiting matrimony as much as she is a tourist visiting the United Kingdom; temporarily trying on a different state and then returning to a home that is imperfect in its own way.

There are a variety of factors contributing to Jane's shaky self-image and lack of confidence in general. On the level of her embodied consciousness, she is extraordinarily concerned with how others perceive how she looks and sounds. Her excess of identities lead her to believe that she stands out in negative way. She is a woman, and, therefore, the gendered other, if one is to look at her circumstances through a Foucauldian lens. She grew up in apartheid era South Africa as a person classified as coloured, putting her into a second category deemed other since she was neither black nor white but both. Only recently has there been a resurgence of Griqua or Khoi pride among some coloureds around recuperating a sort of national identity.⁸⁷ This new nationalism had to do with having traces of the indigenous bloodlines of the original inhabitants of the Cape, the Khoi people. Ironically, 'purity' of pedigree led to the racist nightmare of apartheid in the first place. Thus it is bizarre that people of mixed race are, post-apartheid, seeking a particular racial categorization as validation. Jane's mother, Grace, makes fun of this newfound nationalism and attributes it to the pretensions of the educated younger generation. Grace is uneducated and cleans house for a white woman. She is worried that her new son-in-law will not make a living as an artist and tells the neighbours that he is a teacher, a seemingly more practical profession she imagines they would respect. Yet, the impracticality or elusiveness of conveying concepts via abstract, unstable signification challenges both artists and teachers. If, however, a house is dirty and someone cleans it, it is plain to the observer, in this case Grace, that valuable work has been done. She is comfortable with the real,

the actual, the material and avoids interrogation of the normative for fear of its disruption setting in motion some kind of chaos, even if it were ultimately liberatory.

Generational differences in attitude complicate the problems that Jane encounters, and in some ways, she is an unreliable bridge between Grace's world and Drew's world, the old South Africa and the new, with its attendant shifts in norms around race, gender and class. This is how Wicomb works her strategy of nomadic feminism. A feminist reader with a postmodern sensibility is made uncomfortable by the characterisation of Jane as lacking self-confidence, almost as a symbol of absence or the void.

Jane's sense of herself as an embodied consciousness presents initially as an internal struggle. The narrator offers a view of Jane at the end of the story as having achieved a moment of resolution, where the earlier Cartesian dichotomy is unsettled and Jane achieves her integrated self. But her history of resisting the materiality of her body is crucial to the story and to some insight into her identity formation. Hair, voice and proprioceptivity are contentious sites of her corporeality. The issue of frizzy, typically African hair is significant in this story, as it is in much of Wicomb's work. The hair pencil test⁸⁸ was part of how white apartheid era officials determined how to categorize racially ambiguous-looking South Africans. If a pencil stuck into someone's hair slid out due to lack of curl or frizz, that person was counted as white. And, for most non-white women, having straight, Caucasian-type hair was worth any amount of discomfort. Jane is conflicted about this and is horrified when Drew's (coloured) Auntie Trudie 'instructed Jane to kneel by her chair, and then unashamedly set about checking the hair in the nape of her neck for frizz' (69). In this remembered

⁸⁷ Several dedicated panels were organised on the topic of coloured identity and numerous papers presented at The Cape & the Cosmopolitan: Reading Zoë Wicomb conference at the University of Stellenbosch in April 2010.

flashback to Cape Town, Jane is furious with herself for permitting this violation and not speaking up. She wishes she had refused to submit to this racist, sexist inspection, ironically performed by someone who as an older, coloured woman would be familiar with the indignity and privations that came from results of such tests. Wicomb disturbs expectations around post-apartheid interactions among South Africans in general, and those who were once classified as coloured in particular. This interaction between Jane, Auntie Trudie and Drew uncovers Drew as the agent of nomadism; his reaction is unexpected and forces Jane, if not his auntie, to interrogate her own thinking and her apparent inability to take decisive action. Initially, Jane is outraged that Drew makes a joke about how revealing the hair inspection is of Auntie Trudie's audacity and old-fashioned ways rather than protect his new wife from this invasion. The narrator shows old Auntie Trudie smoothing down her own hair after Drew's snide comment and bolstering her own importance as she 'remembered that no one in her family cleaned for white people' (69). While there may be no chance at mobility between classifications of race and gender in a rigidly stratified society, Auntie Trudie is aware that class mobility is both possible and empowering.

Jane and Drew belong to a new class of South Africans, not quite post-racial, a virtually impossible fantasy in a nation that was built on strict, oppressive racial divisions, but certainly educated and economically better off than their parents' generation. Her education notwithstanding, Jane does want to look attractive, and the Eurocentric model still persists worldwide. She uses chemical straighteners on her hair, suggesting that she is not comfortable with how she looks and is perceived because of her coloured hair and features, as well as her distinctive accent. At times,

⁸⁸ The pencil test is referenced in Wendy Watson's book *Brick by Brick* (2007) published by New Africa Books in Claremont, Western Cape, p.65

she wants to hide. When, on yet another rainy Glasgow day, she says she wants to stay in and read,

Drew said she was being silly. Should he not have greater regard for her feelings, her fear of fumbling with the unfamiliar, her hatred of being conspicuous, of being stared at, of shop assistants speaking slowly, loudly, to accommodate her foreignness, of children pointing? Who cares, he said, by then immersed in his notebook. She thought that he should. On her behalf. (68)

She believes that she looks and sounds like an outsider, an other, and she feels that she does not belong. To what extent, the reader wonders, does she belong, not just as a tourist in Glasgow, but even at home in the Cape? Even Jane's belonging in her own body seems tentative, until her epiphany when she realizes that the sculpted woman in the South African niche of the Doulton Fountain is proudly coloured in a way that Jane aspires to be, 'she occupies her space with ease' (77). Some aspects of Jane's identity have a great deal to do with her gender and race and with the historical specificity of having grown up under apartheid, whilst others are shaped by her fearful personality. Saying this does not indicate a wholesale shift to essentialism, but does acknowledge what Spivak refers to as a kind of strategic essentialism that must be taken into account even while insisting on the validity of multiple, contingent subjectivities. In the moment that Jane transcends these borders or limitations, she forgets her corporeal self and is transformed, her focus outside of herself. The space that Kaatje, the statue in the carved niche, occupies has been made into a representative place by the artist. Using white stone as his medium, he physically molds the form and seeming identity of Kaatje. Unlike Kaatje, Jane's identity is not fixed because it is not, literally, carved in stone. Yet her process of becoming is still comparable. She is hyperaware of the space she occupies in the world. Her proprioceptivity is especially finely tuned when she is exploring an unfamiliar place,

somewhere she feels she does not belong. As she thinks, both self-reflexively and as she interprets her gaze, Wicomb's words allow the unfolding of undefined space as it becomes place for Jane. And place and displacement shape the character's identity. The Victorian-era creator of the Doulton Fountain used stone; Wicomb uses language. In this story, the *mis-en-scene*, or physical representation of space is Scotland with remembered episodes from South Africa. For the emigrant writer, like Wicomb, setting can be problematic because of the tensions between the origin and the located experience of belonging and because of the relationship between memory and language. Ironically, Jane is thousands of miles from home, looking at a monument to Queen Victoria's empire of which her homeland, South Africa, was a part, when she experiences a flash of insight. This time, Jane really sees, having looked before, the sculptural representation of a colonised very young, coloured woman she thinks of as 'Kaatje' after the character, a caricature of a coloured woman from a poem, Kaatje Kekkelbek. The description of Kaatje as seen through Jane's eyes is of a beautiful, self-possessed woman, neither subservient nor arrogant, and certainly not the stereotype of the poem.

She is conspicuously native. Not only are her facial features – cheekbones, nose, full lips – distinctly Khoi, but the fullness of hair framing her face speaks unashamedly of miscegenation... To her left is the bearded white man, a boer with bandolier across his shoulder... The brush of clothing and the symmetries, the repeated verticals of spade and rifle in contact with each left hand, are metonymies of matter-of-fact intimacy. They are unmistakably a couple. (76-7)

Jane realizes that 'Kaatje has been sitting here bathed in grace for more than a century, unembarrassed' (77). One would imagine that a person in Kaatje's situation over a hundred years ago would be constrained by harsh racial, gender, and class bonds imposed by the settlers, but she is portrayed as free. The rain drenches Jane and she is

bathed in shared grace, received or achieved by the act of simply looking at the art, at Kaatje, until it reveals its secrets to her, the way that Drew said it would:

Drew insists that there is nothing to it, nothing arcane about looking at art. It's just about giving it time, attention, looking carefully, because if you can describe a work accurately, you're more than halfway towards understanding what's going on. (69)

Jane is changed by the baptismal experience; she has crossed a border. At dinner that night, she is unselfconscious, animated, apparently comfortable with her self, her integrated embodied consciousness. Jane is identified with Kaatje. A boundary between time and space, between centre and margin has been traversed. Instead of Jane feeling herself subject to the gaze of others, she fixes her gaze on Kaatje and is herself changed.

The ending announces itself as such in its overtly metafictional way and this casts the entire story, in retrospect, in a slightly different light. The reader, lost earlier in the fictional world so completely as to forget its artificiality for a few minutes, is shaken awake and reminded that this world and its characters are constructed of language and framed by genre. As Jane wonders whether or not Kaatje wears a wedding ring, the narrator concludes, 'Kaatje doesn't give a toss, as the character, whose name Jane doesn't know, would say' (79). But this Kaatje is not a person and never has been. She is a sculpted representation of a fictional character from a poem. Actually, she is even further removed from that because it is Jane who has dubbed her Kaatje after the girl in the poem, and it was not the artist's intention to have this symbolic South African figure 'be' or 'stand for' Kaatje at all. In referring to the layers of symbolism and representativity at the end of the story, accessed through Jane's thoughts and associations, Wicomb leads back to the earlier question which clearly applies to this story: Should meaningful art resolve paradoxes or generate more

questions than it answers? Certainly it is part of transnationalism's project to keep asking challenging questions; its task is to remind us to wonder whether we know what we think we know and if we are who we think we are.

There is an exilic sensibility to the work of Allison and Wicomb explored in this chapter. Their writing invites an interrogation of deterritorialised identity shaped by lived experience, memory and imagination. Home and away become states of mind as well as places for their characters and the only way to avoid the existential alienation of the marginalised other is to become nomadic and to seek out opportunities for transversal, lateral connections—with other people and with new ideas. Bone in 'Gospel Song' fails to connect harmoniously with other characters; she does not belong. She does, however, display surprising perspicacity for a child and is brave and forthright in speaking her nomadic critical consciousness out loud. Delia and Cissy in *Cavedweller* establish the lateral links theorised by Lionnet and Shih in their minor transnational theory, and the characters' lives are enhanced by this reciprocity. Elsie in 'Nothing Like the Wind', however, is utterly alienated except for her ability to retreat to a familiar place in her imagination where she brings her notion of home to the strange place she finds herself. Finally, Jane in 'There's the Bird that Never Flew' is initially drawn as a solitary figure, despite being on her honeymoon, and, later, as a result of acquiring the ability to see and be, she emerges bravely nomadic and self-accepting and thus better able to connect with her husband. In all of these examples, conventional understandings of belonging and situated subjectivity are problematised when viewed through the lens of nomadic transnational feminism.

Conclusion

Key issues that have emerged from my study are that postcolonial and transnational feminisms disturb ideas of place-centred identities and that by moving beyond current theory, I have taken the approach that there are shared processes that nations and individuals undergo. Choosing exile as my pivotal idea, I have examined liminal subjectivities and the issue of family, community and national identity in the work of four writers who can be paired for comparison/contrast in a variety of ways: two South African and two from the American south, two mixed race and two white, two representing an older generation of writers, now deceased, and two currently writing, two who identify as queer and two who do not, two who were abjectly poor and two who were working class, all of whom experienced exile. These many fluid permutations underscore my conviction that polarising binaries are restrictive, in fact, damaging to creative critical consciousness and that new ideas and new art come out of acknowledging dynamics that are in constant flux. My model of analysis is to show these four creative writers resisting the limiting homogenising impulse. Each writer takes risks with genre and narrative style and produces work that is powerful, original and significant. In this they are nomadic pathbreakers of the kind described by Rosi Braidotti, whose theory provides the critical underpinning of this thesis.

My work has advanced the way we read postcolonial women's writing by interrogating different facets of displacement--a word fraught with negative connotations, to show how positive, original creativity can grow out of such disruption. Throughout this thesis I have examined, through the lens of nomadic feminism, the ways in which exile informs the work of these four important writers. Examination of the process and theme of exile in this work changes how we look at genre and at representations of the embodied self. These writers are physically and

metaphorically exilic, thus I have argued that the tension between the alienation and sense of belonging they experience yields powerful, new literary expression.

While the main focus of the first chapter is autobiography, I have linked the main writers from South Africa and the American south by means of their shared history of oral storytelling. Heard stories become written narratives for each author in this study. Moving from orality to writing brings attention to form. In this chapter I have explored eruptions/disruptions of autobiography or self life writing that appear in fiction. Generic indeterminacy complicates the short stories and novels labelled as fiction in this study. Similarly, those works categorised as autobiography are a creative narrative shaped by the subject—she tells her story, her version of a truth. I have shown how the writers rework genre to suit their purposes, resulting in hybrid forms and innovative narrative styles.

In the second chapter, I have established a phenomenological foundation of my understanding of the individual, that is, that she comprises an embodied consciousness. The course of one's lived experience is influenced by one's visible identities and invisible identifications. The writers whose work I have analysed are all concerned with racial and gendered identities, and they engage with the materiality of the body in terms of sexuality, disability, class and violence. The younger generation of writers, Wicomb and Allison, but particularly Wicomb, introduce theory into their fiction as an unsettling, enriching postmodern strategy. By injecting metafictionality and the sense that identity is, in part, culturally constructed, they emphasise the generational difference, at least concerning theory, between themselves as writers and the earlier two, McCullers and Head.

The theme of exile is extended in this chapter to include a kind of intrabodily exile in which a character does not feel at home in her own body or mind. Such an

exilic subject may also feel alienated from family, community and nation. I have argued that this discomfort can precipitate the physical or metaphorical move away from the original home towards a better –or at least different--set of circumstances or an entirely new way of thinking about something. The journey is nomadism in practise.

The third chapter of the thesis moves from the body to an exploration of exilic identity, particularly situated subjectivity. I have explored liminal subjectivities here, the self in the context of social interaction as well as the private self of the subject. This chapter has established my contention that identity is not singular or unified, but fluctuating and contingent. In this chapter, I have problematised ‘home’ as the site where identity begins to be formed. The liberation processes of nations and individuals often begin with an idea of home and belonging. Disidentification, I have argued, emerges as a disruptive experience offering nomadic opportunities for the subject.

I have analysed writing by Wicomb and Allison in this chapter using it to show nomadic episodes that result from characters’ liminality. I go on to indicate places where supportive transversal networks are made between marginalised characters following Lionnet and Shih’s theory of minor transnationalism. The minoritarian characters are effective in seizing agency by working around major or dominant forces.

Not only do Carson McCullers, Bessie Head, Zoë Wicomb and Dorothy Allison problematise the categories of race, gender, class and sexuality, but reading them alongside one another adds the complicating, enriching dimension of generational overlaps and gaps in how they write artistic representation as well as the places *from* which and *about* which they write. As part of my conclusion, I offer my

reading of a new short story by Zoë Wicomb to show how it pulls together key thesis debates. The major themes in the story recapitulate those of the three main divisions of the thesis: Speaking Up, Writing Back and Self-Representation; Body and Exilic Consciousness; and Situated Subjectivity.

Queer in Cape Town: Identity and Mortality in ‘In Search of Tommie’

‘In Search of Tommie’ is Wicomb’s most recently published short story. It initially appeared as a free online download and was published shortly thereafter in September 2009 in a special 25th anniversary issue of *Wasafiri*, a journal of international contemporary writing. It was included in an anthology called *Touch: Stories of Contact* (2009), sold to raise funds for a South African AIDS awareness and prevention organisation.⁸⁹ The concept of a fundraising/consciousness-raising book is extremely useful in propelling my argument for a nomadic shift in thinking which precipitates new writing of all genres and leads to theory-inspired activism in a productive cycle of social justice. It is in this story, the final literary analysis of my thesis, that I draw together the many strands of theory that run through my work. Philosophy becomes practice; words and ideas, theory and literature really can be practically applied to change minds and lives. I wholeheartedly agree with Dorothy Allison who says that she believes literature should ‘simply ... push people into changing their ideas about the world, and to go further, ... encourage us in the work of changing the world, to making it more just and more truly human’ (1994: 165).

⁸⁹ The story was included in an anthology *Touch: Stories of Contact* (2009), proceeds from the sale of which support the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a South African AIDS activist organisation.

Tommie of the title refers to two characters; one is the given name of the protagonist, who prefers to go by his initials, TS, in order to distance himself from his father, and the other is his African father from the Venda tribe who abandoned TS and his African mother and started a new family in England. The reader discovers that the elder Tommie, if he is who TS thinks he is, also left his white, English lover or wife and their daughter, Chris Hallam decades ago. Clues to the identities of both Tommies, the purported father, whom TS refers to in Afrikaans as the vark or pig, and TS's mother calls 'the ensnarer', and TS himself never amount to anything definitive. The reader only knows that TS is a gay, black man dying of AIDS and that he needs to believe that the English writer, Chris Hallam, is his coloured half-sister. While he may be all of these things, TS is also none of them if one takes TS to stand for typescript. As Andrew van der Vlies says of TS 'he is yet another character-cipher who draws our attention to the author's metafictional concern to unsettle expectations of an uncomplicated realism' (425). In addition, TS is an intertextual reference to Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' with its metaconsciousness of language, 'it is impossible to say just what I mean' (line 104), and its anxiety-producing awareness of isolation—the bleakness of modernity. In the poem, Eliot uses fragments of formal poetic structure rather than all free verse to subvert expectations of form and to disturb romantic ideals about art or life. Wicomb's referencing of Eliot in this story works as a powerful kind of postmodern shorthand, evoking associations with the exilic and the nomadic in her work.

The narrative point of view is third person revealing the thoughts of TS and later of Chris. The setting is mostly in TS's mother's tiny house in Langa Township in Cape Town. The township is a relic of apartheid when the Group Areas Act segregated blacks from whites and required the different races to live in separate

areas. Black townships consisted mostly of substandard housing and shacks in neighbourhoods where crime flourished. The other setting is TS's lover Joe's flat in the desirable part of Cape Town called Sea Point, near the beach, overlooking the Atlantic.

While this story cannot be construed as autobiographical—making the connection with the focus of the first chapter of my thesis—it is significant that Chris Hallam's book apparently is. TS's lover, Joe, a schoolteacher, has given TS the book to read warning 'that it was a fictionalised autobiography, something about its postmodernness, which he [TS] supposed accounted for the jumping about of the story, the fact that he was not always sure of what was going on. But in spite of that there was the knowledge, the certainty, so that he read the book several times. Just to make doubly sure' that the author was 'undoubtedly the daughter of the ensnarer; in other words, she was TS's sister' (52-53). There are no excerpts from Chris's book, only a few pointed speculations about it and TS's desperate presumption that 'Tommie' refers to the man who is their father. The metafictional and postmodernist moments in the short story are a hallmark of Wicomb's style, which holds up seeming certainties to the light for closer examination and interrogation. This strategy is associated with a nomadic critical consciousness. She has TS initially afraid of uncertainties, hesitant to take risks, and then undergoing a radical change in mindset. He is frail and is well aware that he has limited time remaining, so Joe recommends a programme of reading which will enrich TS's life and not exhaust him. A nomadic change in attitude ensues and TS is transformed. The narrator reports:

No wonder TS has for so long avoided reading. Because why, it takes you into adventures just as if you had packed a rucksack and set off blindly, without a map, and not even knowing where you're heading... But now that things have taken such an unfortunate turn, when there is so little time left, so little energy for striking out with a rucksack, he has become addicted to heading off into stories. (51)

The word 'stories' connotes fiction, make believe or lies, and the fact that words are approximations of what is, either materially or in the writer's imagination, removes them even further from any singular, fixed idea of truth, yet TS thinks excitedly: 'Talk about meeting up with truth in books!' (51) as he makes up his mind that Chris is his sister. He writes to her in England praising her book and saying 'I have reason to believe we have the same father' (53). Eventually she replies to let him know she will coming to Cape Town to a Book Fair and will be able to manage a quick visit to Langa.

The much-recited evils of colonisation and the analysis of postcolonial subjects have a twist in 'In Search of Tommie'; everything depends upon who is telling the story, on point of view. The alleged father, Tommie, a black South African colonised subject travels to England. According to TS's mother, the elder Tommie was not the silenced, powerless subject portrayed in a great deal of postcolonial writing, rather he was 'a gentleman ...a university man' who went to study in England, or 'to do some important business overseas' where 'he got an English woman pregnant' (52). Tommie's virility is everywhere in evidence, and while his son and daughter (if she is his daughter) do not know him but certainly find him wanting, he cannot be cast as a victim. According to the two who may be his children, Tommie is a kind of perpetrator. Stereotypical roles of exploited and exploiter are reversed and expectations around the postcoloniality of the situation are disrupted. In terms of a feminist reading, however, the stereotype of the irresponsible man is perpetuated. The women whom Tommie impregnated are left to struggle on and raise his offspring without his support. For a doubly fictional construct, that is, the fictional figment of a fictional character's imagination (TS decides

that the man in the 'lost' photograph, the character in his mother's stories, should be his and Chris's father) Tommie certainly has a lot to answer for.

The literal and figurative transnational border crossings that take place in this story are profound. Tommie travelled from Cape Town to London. TS's wished-for 'sister' Chris, is the offspring of an African father (Tommie?) and a white, English mother. She has been to Africa, to Kenya, once before and now comes to South Africa. In addition to characters traversing physical borders through international flight, there are examples of nomadic transformational adjustments to habits of thought. In terms of the changing nation-state, the story is set after the end of apartheid. The monolithic racist juridico-political apparatus enforced by the police was dismantled by 1994 without a full scale violent revolution. TS's seemingly entrenched ways of thinking are being shaken loose and altered. In terms of evolving relationships for the individual and the family, TS changes his mind about reading through reading, becomes emboldened and less fearful and also grows more tolerant of his mother who used to annoy him. At a time when family, genealogy and identity are unclear and uncertain to TS, the one given is that his mother is his mother and she is stereotypically maternal. His mother, who used to be homophobic now acknowledges her son's lover, Joe, and wonders how much longer he will be able to take care of her son. Other characters display changing habits of thought, too. Chris makes the leap from being highly suspicious of peoples' motives, having been harassed for financial assistance by Kenyan students after her previous trip to Africa. At first, she thinks 'There was no point in being too encouraging' (54) and she seems cold-hearted. Later, she decides not to tell TS and his mother that she does not remember her father

at all. Her attitude towards them softens, but through the narrator the reader sees Chris astonished at herself, at '[w]hat possesses her to talk such nonsense, to capitulate to these crazy people' (55). At the end of the story, once she grasps the severity of TS's condition, she tells a compassionate lie to give him peace. The notion of lies and variations on truth is central to the first chapter of this study, 'Southern Stories: Speaking Up, Writing Back and Self-Representation'.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on body and exilic consciousness which are crucial in this story most of all because TS is so conscious of his weakening body and his looming mortality. The third chapter focuses on situated subjectivity/identity, which cannot be completely separated from body and exilic consciousness. Because of this inextricability, I will address aspects of body and situated subjectivity in 'In Search of Tommie' together.

TS's visible identities are that he is black and male. According to his mother, he looks like his tall, slim father, especially about the eyes and the brow. Heredity and DNA must be acknowledged as counting for something in the material, bodily construction of identity. The rest of personhood is formed by cultural construction, response to lived experience and performativity. TS knows things through his body and thinks about the conviction he has that Chris must be his sister as a visceral knowledge, 'like fresh blood rushing rudely through his veins, roaring in his ears' (51). His failing body identifies TS as a man dying of an unnamed disease, presumably AIDS, and his condition is alluded to in phrases like 'unseasonable weather ... drained him, made his chest wheeze' (51), 'a strange wobbliness—perhaps a new symptom

of his sickness--seemed to invade his body' (53) and 'TS holds up a bony hand' (55). When TS brings Chris to meet Joe, Joe 'throws his arms around TS, which triggers a coughing fit'(56). What is not immediately apparent to the observer is that another aspect of TS's identity is that he is gay. There are, however, clues in the word choices and descriptions of his slightly effeminate gestures that would alert someone who is watching and listening to TS to the likelihood that he is gay. Van der Vlies writes that TS 'is a particularly apt figure of disruption *of* and dis-ease *in* a text that flirts with stereotype' (425). The reader assumes that TS's HIV Positive health status that developed into full-blown AIDS was transmitted through homosexual sex. Thus two critical aspects of his identity, that he is gay and he is dying, are conflated. This concept conjures up a picture from Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* where Elizabeth recalls a neighbourhood of gay, coloured men in Cape Town. The narrator says that as Elizabeth closed her eyes 'all these Coloured men lay down on their backs...and began to die slowly' (45). The link between sexuality and death in both pieces of writing is clear, but while Head and her protagonist are unstable and homophobic, Wicomb is not. TS is in so many ways a non-normative character and as such he embodies an exilic consciousness. Of course he would be exilic, as he is someone who can tick multiple boxes on the list of identity politics categories.

As far as bodily attraction and repulsion are concerned, TS finds the female body repugnant. 'For TS reproduction is horrible ... he has never had anything to do with women. There is his mother, of course, but he does not like women's bundled-up softness. Or the crying' (51). He admits that he is a

‘bigoted, sexist moffie’⁹⁰; he would have no truck with a soggy book – how else would a woman’s tears translate on to a page?’ (52) At first he is reluctant to read a book written by a woman. ‘It was the author’s name that persuaded TS, or so he said. Chris Hallam could pass for a man’ (52). What he finds he likes about the book, besides the ‘tingling sense of recognition’ which at first he mistook ‘for a new symptom of his sickness’, is the ‘cool, matter-of-fact way in which she described the man’s failings as a father’. It is as if TS is attributing some imagined masculine quality to the writing.

TS sometimes seems quite grounded and realistic and at others rather fanciful. He goes so far as to acknowledge that he is indulging in wishful thinking, almost as if he were scripting and manipulating circumstances the way that a postmodern narrator might. When he writes to Chris that they may have the same father, the third person narrator provides what sounds like TS’s weak justification for such a claim, ‘Some would say that he had no reason whatsoever but, given that there was so little time, given that he would succumb sooner rather than later, he would not be held back by the unreasonable demands of reason. Enough for him that the woman struck a chord ... Besides, if she came, he would get his mother involved, get her to persuade Chris of old Tommie’s identity’ (53). This throws TS and the narrator’s motives into doubt. The reader is reminded that people are changeable even though they seem to desire consistency. Wicomb calls into question the narrator’s reliability and the strategies used in literary art, the representation of ideas and people as stories and characters.

⁹⁰ Moffie is South African slang for a male homosexual.

Food is richly symbolic in the story and has to do with body, community and identification with a particular place and its people. As with Dorothy Allison's story 'A Lesbian Appetite', regional specialities and flavours are associated with emotions through memory in Wicomb's story. TS reminisces about visiting his grandparents in the Transkei 'where he helped his grandmother make snares for wild animals...Gogo's wild meat stew with a hunk of stiff pap, that was something to remember; they ate and told stories...' (52). TS's mother wants to present an authentic South African meal to Chris when she comes to visit. She wishes to honour the person who could be her son's half sister by taking the time and trouble to prepare 'offal and trotters with pap. And for her the special treat of brains tied into the little pouch of tripe – you know, the honeycombed part of the stomach' (53). The menu would be meaningful as this was Tommie's favourite African food and is no longer readily available—it represents a link to the past. TS manages to talk his mother out of making offal and Chris tells them that she cannot stay long enough for an entire meal. Instead, when Chris comes, they have coffee and koeksisters, a type of plaited doughnut drenched in syrup. There is no coffee for TS who cannot tolerate hot drinks because of his illness. His mother infantilises him saying 'and milk for my boy'(54). Chris only realises that TS has AIDS when she sees Joe greet him. Like TS's mother, Joe also talks to him as if he is a child:

Are you looking after yourself, he asks, taking your medicine? It's orange juice for you, darling he says, as he opens a bottle of red wine.

Of course, that's it. Chris chides herself for not having realised earlier, for not paying attention. The poor guy is ill. Tilted pathetically towards Joe, TS's face for a second seems ghostlike, as if she is looking at an X-ray. (56)

The closing scene is moving. There is no proof that Chris and TS are related, but Chris now understands that she can help him to feel better by playing along. It is a kind gesture acknowledging that we believe what we need to believe, perhaps most tenaciously when time is so clearly limited. Wicomb's description of nature lends a certain gentleness to the end of the story. Phrases like '[t]he light is dying', 'a pale moon' and 'the tenderness of the light' provide the backdrop for Chris's compassion. 'She places a hand on TS's shoulder' and calls him 'my brother'. The story of fragmented, exilic transnationalism ends here with what Bessie Head might call a gesture of belonging. (*A Question of Power*: 206) Chris reaches out and establishes a transversal supportive connection with TS. The sale of the volume within which this story appeared to raise money for AIDS awareness and treatment, facilitates a change in critical consciousness and lays the groundwork for practical change.

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My analysis of Wicomb's short story weaves together the main strands of the entire thesis. I use the story to focalise how the process and theme of exile—material and psychic border-crossings--has changed how we look at representations of the embodied self. Throughout the thesis, I have shown how connections between marginalised figures in the literary history of South Africa and the American south liberate new meanings from important texts. Finally, the fact that this piece was included in a fundraising anthology makes a tangible case for my argument that theory and literature can help to further the cause of social justice. I have demonstrated a new and different way of

reading these writers which invites a new and different critical consciousness.

Forging one's own rhizomatic path leads to innovation and change.

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